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**SUPER**

# SCIENCE



JUNE

**STORIES**

**READ IT TODAY—LIVE IT TOMORROW!**

A STORY OF  
WORLDS BEYOND  
**EARTHMAN,  
BEWARE!**

by  
**POUL ANDERSON**  
MANY OTHERS

JUNE 1951

**SUPER**

**SCIENCE**

**STORIES**

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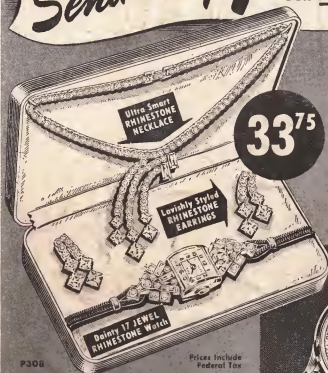
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P308

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# BILL OUTSMARTED THE SPIES AND THEN...



THEN IT'S  
YOURS?



YES, AND IF YOU  
WILL BRING IT TO  
ME AT ONCE, THERE  
IS A LIBERAL  
REWARD!

BILL BAKER, YOUNG LAWYER, FOUND A BRIEF CASE COMING HOME ON THE MIDNIGHT COMMUTING TRAIN AND NOW IT LOOKS LIKE HE HAS LOCATED THE OWNER...



SO...YOU HAVE  
EXAMINED THE  
CONTENTS, EH?

THAT'S HOW  
I FOUND YOUR  
PHONE NUMBER.

COME  
WITH ME,  
PLEASE



HURRY UP!  
THERE'S NO  
TIME TO LOSE!

DON'T WORRY.  
HE'LL BE A LONG  
TIME GETTING OUT  
OF THIS!

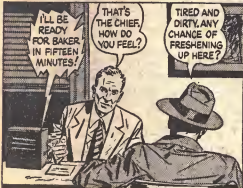


WHEN!  
DID YOU  
GET THEM?

WE SURE  
DID...  
PAPERS  
AND ALL!

YOU'LL SEE  
YOUR "FRIENDS"  
DOWN AT THE  
BUREAU

AND THEN THE FEDERAL AGENTS ARRIVED...



I'LL BE  
READY  
FOR BAKER  
IN FIFTEEN  
MINUTES!

THAT'S  
THE CHIEF.  
HOW DO  
YOU FEEL?

TIRED AND  
DIRTY. ANY  
CHANCE OF  
FRESHENING  
UP HERE?



HERE,  
A CLEAN  
SHAVE  
WILL  
HELP

THANKS



I FEEL LIKE  
A NEW MAN!  
THAT WAS THE  
SLICKEST, MOST  
REFRESHING  
SHAVE I'VE  
EVER HAD!

THIN  
GILLETTES  
ARE PLENTY  
KEEN AND  
EASY  
SHAVING



SO WHEN I SAW  
"URANIUM" AND  
"SECRET" ON THE  
PAPERS, I CALLED  
YOUR OFFICE  
FIRST

... AND NETTED  
US TWO  
DANGEROUS  
SPIES

HE HAS LOOKS,  
COURAGE AND  
INTELLIGENCE.  
WE NEED MEN  
LIKE HIM



ENJOY FAST, GOOD-LOOKING SHAVES  
AT A SAVING... USE THIN GILLETTES.  
FAR KEENER AND LONGER LASTING THAN  
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GILLETTES FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR EXACTLY  
AND ELIMINATE THE RISK OF SCRAPES  
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# SUPER SCIENCE

STORIES

READ IT TODAY—LIVE IT TOMORROW!

VOL. 8 JUNE, 1951 NO. 2

## NOVEL OF THE FUTURE

### ESCAPE TO CHAOS.....John D. MacDonald 38

At bay against his dissolving skies he fought—the last champion, of a star-spanning dynasty which never existed—save to die!

## TWO NOVELETTES

### EARTHMAN, BEWARE!.....Poul Anderson 16

"Come and get me!" he thundered into the empty vastnesses of space, this tiny, earthbound creature who dared to challenge the dread, immortal race that had tamed the stars . . . and cowered in fear as the answer echoed back—"Earthman, beware!"

### IT HAPPENED TOMORROW.....Robert Bloch 80

Now it can be told—the story that is not of today, yet might be. What would you do—and how would you act—in a world gone mad?  
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## STORIES OF TOMORROW

### OBLIVION QUEST.....Wilbur S. Peacock 32

On a blasted, dying Earth they molded Man's yesterdays—three inhuman creatures, whose only tie to humanity was a deathless hatred for those who gave them birth!

### COSMIC KNOT.....Peter Reed 66

Franzie's dimension-spanning hands were worth millions to a ruthless promoter—if he could manage to stay out of them. . . .

### STAR SLAVE.....William Morrison and Harry Nix 70

Born to serve his masters was Marko—the overlords to whom he granted every privilege save extinction!

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### MUTATION.....Lilith Lorraine 31

Cover by Van Dongen

Inside Illustrations by Savage, Van Dongen, Bok and Lawrence

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Eng.<br><b>Stationary Engineering Course</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> Boilermaking<br><input type="checkbox"/> Combust. Engrg. <input type="checkbox"/> Engine Running<br><input type="checkbox"/> Marine Engineering<br><input type="checkbox"/> Power Plant Engr. <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engineer<br><b>Textile Courses</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> Cotton Manufacturing <input type="checkbox"/> Loom Fixing<br><input type="checkbox"/> Rayon Weaving <input type="checkbox"/> Textile Designing<br><input type="checkbox"/> Woolen Manufacturing |
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# FANDOM'S CORNER

Conducted by James V. Taurasi

THE returns of the *National Fantasy Fan Federations* election (NFFF) held last Fall have just come in and they show that: Rick Sneary was re-elected President and that Don Ford, Stan Skirvin, Everett Winne, Ray C. Higgs and Roy Lavender were elected to the Board of Directors. Roy Lavender being elected as Chairman of this Board. They will hold their offices for the year 1951. The NFFF is the largest national science-fiction-fantasy club in the world, with over 400 members. Write to Sec. Roy Lavender, Box 132, Delaware, Ohio. Dues to the NFFF are only \$1.00 a year.

A new scientification club, *The Tri-State Sfantasy Club* is planning to publish a fan magazine and needs material badly. Their magazine will be published quarterly and will be mimeographed. Write to Don Myers, 1507 South 7th Street, Keokuk, Iowa.

Roger Nelson of 4070 Georgia, San Diego, Calif., reports on *The San Diego Science-Fiction and Fantasy Society*. He tells us of a "special" Flying Saucer meeting held recently, at which Mr. Mead Layne of Borderline Science, expressed his theory of the origin of the strange disks.

The 1951 World Convention, the 9th since 1939 will be held in New Orleans over the Labor Day week end. Already

lined up for the program are Doc. E. E. Smith, E. E. Evans, Stanley Mullen, Mack Reynolds, Fredric Brown and others. You can help make this convention a success by joining the Convention Committee. Interested? Write to Harry B. Moore, 2703 Camp Street, New Orleans 13, La.

Speaking of Conventions, here is one of a more serious nature. *The Fantasy Veterans Association* are going to hold a Convention-Auction in New York, either late in April or early May. The date and place have not as yet been selected. The aim of this get-together is to make some hard cash to use in supplying fans in the service with scientific material and aid.

Mr. Jakobsson of *Super Science* and Mrs. Gnaedinger of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and *Fantastic Novels* have promised original art work for the affair. Donations of all types are requested for the auction. For full details write to Ray Van Houten, Secretary, 127 Spring Street, Paterson 3, New Jersey.

From Vol Molesworth of Australia comes his first effort at professional booklets. His Futurian Press of Sydney has just published "A Checklist of Australian Fantasy," a 22 page printed booklet listing most of the fantasy books of Australia up to the year 1937.

(Continued on page 8)

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(Continued from page 6)

Now for this month's press' publications:

**DESTINY**, No. 3, published quarterly by Jim Bradley and Malcolm Willite, 15¢ a copy. To subscribe write to Allen Keeney, 32 45 N. E. 73rd, Portland, Oregon. This is a 16 page, quarter-size, photo-offset general fan mag. It's been improving right along in format and material and this issue is the best yet. Good illustrations and material plus photos of the members of Portland's new stf club.

**ODD**, No. 8, published bi-monthly by Dugie Fisher Jr., 1302 Lester Street, Poplar Bluff, Missouri, 15¢ a copy. A thick 32 page mimeographed magazine with an excellent printed cover. A most interesting magazine of articles and features, plus one fan story. We greatly enjoyed "Behind Friedman's Iron Curtain" by Richard Elsberry. Fan politics are usually mighty interesting... if you're not mixed up in it. Plenty of reading material in this fan mag and the only suggestion we'd offer is that they improve their interior format.

**SPACESHIP**, No. 11, published quarterly by Bob Silverberg and Saul Diskin, 760 Montgomery Street, Brooklyn 13, New York. 10¢ a copy. Greatly improved since they went large-size and completely mimeographed. The fiction has been cut down to one story and now articles and departments are featured. 16 large-size pages.

**QUANDRY**, No. 6, published monthly at 101 Wager Street, Savannah, Georgia, 10¢ a copy. Another general fan mag that has improved greatly since the first issue. 26 pages, mimeographed. We'd suggest you read "How To Kill A Fanzine" by Bob Tucker; it's our pick of the best in the issue.

**Fantasy-Times**, No. 122, published semi-monthly by Fandom House, % James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Avenue, Flushing, New York, 10¢ a copy. This issue tells

that the change of date starting with the April *Super Science*, doesn't mean that the mag has skipped a month, plus numerous items from England and Australia. This is fandom's oldest fan mag.

**THE IMAGINATIVE COLLECTOR** combined with **DAWN**, No. 12, published by Russel K. Watkins 203 Wampum Avenue, Louisville 9, Kentucky. 15¢ a copy. Two mags in one. **Articles and letters**, with the letter section **being the most interesting**. Mimeographed and 20 pages. Needed for this mag is a **shorter title**, and better format.

**PEON**, No. 16, published quarterly by Charles Lee Riddle, PN1, USN, Fleet All Weather Training Unit, Pacific, % Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, Calif. 9 issues for \$1.00. Editor Riddle being on active duty with the Navy, it's a wonder he finds time to publish a fan magazine. A neatly mimeographed 36 page general magazine with articles and departments of interest to all. By all means get this one.

**FAN-FARE**, Vol. 2—No. 1, published bi-monthly by W. Paul Ganlev, 119 Ward Rd., N. Tonawanda, New York. 15¢ a copy. First Anniversary issue and an extra large edition at that. This is the best magazine featuring fan fiction. Cover and interior illustrations go a long way in making this the best issue yet published. An excellent issue. Fiction plus articles and departments.

Fandom's Corner is your section of *Super Science Stories*. We will publish news of your organizations, either national, state, or local. We will publish your material needs for your fan magazines etc. Just send us the information and we'll place it here. All information and fan mags to be reviewed should be addressed: Fandom's Corner, % *Super Science Stories*, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 East 42nd Street, New York, 17, New York.



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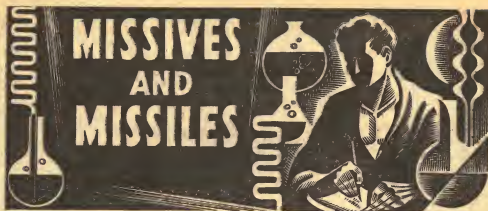
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**E**VERY now and then someone writes in kind of confused about just which issue of *Triple S* he, she—or it—is expected to comment on. And in this month's column we have a letter which very reasonably wants to know why we don't print letters about immediately preceding issues, instead of the one before the one before.

Well, we'd like to keep a few secrets, but that's never a good idea in science-fiction. You know how it is—spy-rays cause holes in the walls, disembodied heads frown disapprovingly from wastepaper baskets, threatening letters come in written on the hide of a zidnik—and, what with one thing and another, we find it hard to get any work done. So here's the stereo. *Triple S* comes out every second month. However, printers like to work in advance.

Hence, if your letters arrive early enough, we'll run 'em right off. That's what we like to do. But don't worry about that deadline—we treasure your missives, new or old, and not only like to publish 'em in the following issue, but like to reread 'em again. So why don't you? Who ever gets enough of anybody?

And why don't some of you get on the ball and discuss future issues? Is *Time Travel* dead?

Dear Editor:

I won't comment on the new format of *SSS* as countless others have already done so. All you have to do now is get rid of some

of that printing on the cover which completely ruins same.

The cover was fair, but nothing to brag about. Nobody can draw people better than Lawrence but when it comes to machinery he doesn't do too well. The best interior ill was on pp. 14-15 by (natch) Finlay.

Now for the stories. The "novel" by Mac couldn't have been better. The shorts were all possible. But the reprint—Gogh (meaning no in caps NO). Seriously, there are enough reprint mags on the market without cluttering *SSS* up with them.

Suggestions:

- (1) Trimmed edges (Sigh)
- (2) Longer (much) M&M
- (3) Acquire Bradbury

All in all a very large improvement over previous issues. (Praise Allah.)

I'll close with a request: Anyone with back issues of mags to trade for stamps please contact me. I am also interested in knowing when *SSS* first came out and, after being discontinued, when publishing was resumed. Ditto for *FFM* and *FN*.

Jan Romanoff  
26601 So. Western  
Apt. #341  
Lomita, California

Lessee, now . . . *SSS* appeared first in March, 1940, ran until May, 1943, returned January, 1949. *FFM* first hit the stands with the issue of Sept.-Oct., 1939, and *FN* in July, 1940.

Dear Editor:

I started reading *Science* mags about three years ago. Find them very interesting. I have been tempted to write previous to this, but this is the first and most likely the last time I'll write. Maybe.

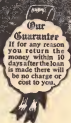
I'm a University of Washington student, (hch heh.) Yes, even we indulge in the supernatural. I haven't read a science mag since summer because I did not want it to

(Continued on page 12)



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(Continued from page 10)

interfere with my school work. Now that our first quarter exams are over, I have really been filling up my eyeballs with the galaxies. *Super Science* was the first I bought and, well, I'm rather disappointed.

Here is why! The stories that don't appear in my ratings don't appear because they are not worthy of comment.

1. **VICTORY UNINTENTIONAL**—This was excellent. I had a date at 8 and didn't start getting ready for it until 8:10 when I finished.

2. **HAND FROM THE VOID**—This would have been number one easily until the author started describing who Means was, etc., in such a poor, boring manner. It still had a good plot.

3. **FIRST LIFE**—Very clever.

4. The rest, well, you're the editor, what do you think? (Since you ask, very fine stories, never read better, liked 'em all.—Ed.)

Now for a verbal chewing up of Paul, the artist. Are you an artist, Paul? Here are three blunders you pulled in the picture of **ETERNITY ORBIT**. Blunder I, you showed the "it" traveling at super speed by having lines streaking behind it. Remember, it was going three feet a minute.

Blunder II. I thought a space ship was durable and as strong or stronger than diamondized steel, yet you show Savold's body crushing the ship as though the ship was made of cardboard.

Blunder III. You have enough light illuminating your picture that a blind pig could have seen "it" coming. Yet Savold, a cunning leader, could not see it. (tch tch) Okay, Paul, I'm done.

**MISSIVE & MISSILES** comment: (chuckle.) I get a big kick out of you peasant critics, especially the girls who know nothing of the sciences and some of the guys who think they do. Really humorous.

Sincerely,

Peter T. Vas, Jr.

180 Baker Hall

University of Washington

Seattle, Washington

P. S. Print this letter, so I'll know Missives and Missiles are on the level.

Okay?

Dear Editor:

'Tis unnecessary to say that *Triple S* is improving because that is an understood fact—besides, most other fans share my sentiments.

I have a few beefs and a few comments to make. First I shall speak, or rather write, about the reprint subject, to wit I say:—if the future reprints are as good as Isaac Asimov's **VICTORY UNINTENTIONAL** keep up the reprints. I would like to see more reprints of stories hacked out by Asimov.

Re **OPINIONS, PLEASE:**

**VICTORY UNINTENTIONAL** by I Asimov was by far the best in the book. It

surpassed all other stories I have read except **FLIGHT TO FOREVER** by Poul Anderson which was printed in Nov. SSS. The cover of Nov. 50 SSS, I might add, is the best I have ever laid my eyes on. This of course is my humble opinion, which can be taken literally as I am a new fan in the S-F field.

**RAMPART OF HEAR** by Benjamin Ferris, was second and a good story about botany, a subject which is not used very often I believe.

**DESTINY DEFERRED** is next, followed by **HAND FROM THE VOID** and **ETERNITY ORBIT**, and last comes **FIRST LIFE** and **THE BLOOD STAR**.

I might suggest that **MISSIVES AND MISSILES** be extended. Even if it means cutting down **FANDOM'S CORNER** and **THE SCIENCE FICTIONEER**. M and M is the shortest letters-from-the-fans column in any S-F mag I have read. So let's enlarge it, shall we? Also, M and M would be much more interesting if there were comments by ye Ed at the end of each letter.

The cover was one of Lawrence's poorer efforts. Inside illos were fair. Who did the illo for **VICTORY UNINTENTIONAL**? It looked like a Paul effort tho I could be wrong and probably I am. Anyboo it was the best in the whole (hole?) darn pulp.

Why are the letters two issues behind? I mean the letters in Jan. 51 were about Sept. 50. I should imagine they would be about Nov. 50.

Well, remember. More stories by Isaac Asimov, enlarge **MISSIVES AND MISSILES**, and get something by Bradbury and Brackette.

Gerald A. Steward  
166 McRoberts Ave.  
Toronto, Ontario  
Canada

Super Science Stories  
Popular Publications

205 E. 42 St.

New York, N.Y.

Dear Editor:

Congratulations on your Jan. ish! The best yet! SSS is finally pulling ahead of the field. If you could get Smith for a cover there'd be no stopping you. The cover is a beaut. The illos are the best I've ever seen. Wish you'd auction them after every issue. I'd give plenty for the original of the one on page 106-107. Every story is excellent. Especially **HAND FROM THE VOID** and **VICTORY UNINTENTIONAL**.

Hoskins, what do you mean, no reprints? I know, you've probably got every promag and fan mag ever published, but think of us poor neophytes who ain't been reading this for more than 5 years. I'll trade FA Dec. '48 and Oct. '49 for Astonishing Dec. '41.

Sincerely,  
M. McNeil  
2146 Stanmore  
Houston, Texas

(Continued on page 14)



IF IT SLIPS... IF IT CHAFES... IF IT GRIPES... THEN

# THROW AWAY THAT TRUSS!

Why put up with days... months... YEARS of discomfort, worry, and fear—if we provide you with the support you want and need? Learn NOW about this perfected truss-invention for most forms of reducible rupture. Surely you keenly desire... you eagerly CRAVE to enjoy most of life's activities and pleasures once again. To work... to play... to live... to love... with the haunting fear of Rupture lessened in your thoughts! Literally thousands of Rupture sufferers have entered this Kingdom of Paradise Regained... have worn our Appliance without the slightest inconvenience. Perhaps we can do as much for you. Some wise man said, "Nothing is impossible in this world"—and it is true, for where other trusses have failed is where we have had our greatest success in many cases! Even doctors—thousands of them—have ordered for themselves and their patients. Unless your case is absolutely hopeless do not despair. The coupon below brings our Free Rupture Book in plain envelope. Send the coupon now.

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C. E. BROOKS, Inventor  
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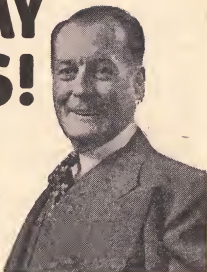
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"A few weeks ago I received the Appliance you made for me. I put it on the afternoon I received it and wouldn't do without it now. My fellow workmen notice how much better I can do my work and get around over these ships—and believe me, the work in a Navy shipyard is anything but easy. You have been a life saver to me. I never miss a day's work now. One of my buddies was ruptured on the job about two months ago. After seeing my Appliance he would me to order him one." J. A. Comer, 1606 Green Ave., Orange, Texas.

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State whether for Man ☐ Woman ☐ or Child ☐

(Continued from page 12)

Dear Editor:

A monthly reprint mag? Only on one condition: That you reprint more stories like Asimov's VICTORY UNINTENTIONAL. I had read it before, several times in fact, but when I saw it again I couldn't resist re-reading it, just to prove to myself that it was just as good as I remembered it. It was.

If you do come out with another mag you may be sure of my two-bits? Thirty-five cents? Fifty cents? (stop me, quick). I read quite a few magazines now but there's always room for one more.

Now that that's off my mind, I'll list the stories according to my opinion. (Anybody who disagrees is strictly a peasant.)

**HAND FROM THE VOID . . .** Pretty good but it would have rated lower if it hadn't been for that last paragraph. I had to read it twice.

**THE BLOOD STAR . . .** I screamed at Parker not to do it but the dern fool wouldn't listen. Any other ending would have lost most of the story's impact.

**DESTINY DEFERRED . . .** Well done, Farrell.

**RAMPART OF FEAR . . .** The same old plot, over and over and over and . . .

**ETERNITY ORBIT . . .** Absolutely no comment.

**FIRST LIFE . . .** Roger Dee has written some pretty good shorts. This wasn't one of them.

I am not rating VICTORY because it is a reprint; I consider it unfair to rate a reprint with the other stories.

There is only one complaint I have concerning Super Science. The dirty son of a zidnik who writes those blurbs ought to be locked in a room papered with Bergy covers. (Fate worse than death.) Those adjectives, those irrelevant polysyllabic sentences, those "mindless clutching tendrils of the alien hunger-things" . . . ARRRRGH! I know all about circulation, policy dictation from the brass, and the like, but I can't keep from pleading for blurbs that concern the story.

Aside from your blurbs you have a swell mag with swell departments. Please keep up the good work.

Sincerely yours,  
Willy Markham  
3039 West Lincoln  
Phoenix, Arizona

We are not a dirty son of a zidnik. We wash!

Dear Ed:

When I first read SSS I said; "Hmmm, Well, I've seen better, but it's not too bad."

When you took off the Rocket ship on the cover I expostulated, "What an improvement!"

Then came a whole line of excellent stories, and all I could say was, "SSS will sometime be best of all! (If it's not already!)"

Then came future issues, and I began to see your mag degenerate into what it once was. However, I still had some hope that Super Science would get out of this literary slump, and start moving.

But I've just got the January issue, and I see that there's nothing that can be done. While all science-fiction today is in the pulp field, s-f itself is not pulp. It not only is going to have some all slick magazines out soon, but pulp is a word for cheap literature, which s-f is not. Even your mag is not that type of pulp.

All the stories were bad. The worst was HAND FROM THE VOID. I have read many pieces by MacDonald, but, even though they were not works of art, they were readable. This one was inanely idiotical.

Surely Popular Publications can do better than that—or can they?

Very truly yours,  
Robert D. McNamara, esq.  
50 Plaza Street,  
Brooklyn 17, N.Y.

Dear Sir:

A few words in appreciation of your magazine and also your partner FN.

I first saw SSS in a British edition. I have been reading STF for twenty years, since I was ten years of age. Being now somewhat discerning in my choice of STF I was at first a bit dubious of buying your magazine. Ah! I thought, after seeing the cover, what trash the stories must be. More like a sex magazine. I did buy it though, and was agreeable surprised. The stories as a whole keep up a pretty good standard, and who should I see in that first copy than an old friend of many years ago—Neil R. Jones "Professor Jameson."

I can understand though, why some of your readers crib at the covers, look how I felt on first seeing it, but I have come to look on them now as works of art, as indeed they are. You have the best artists in the field, and whatever Finlay or Lawrence does is good to look at.

Since the time I brought that first copy I have managed to obtain most of the back issues of both FN and SSS since their reissue. For me the original American magazines are far more satisfactory and I would like in the future to be assured of a regular supply. Not yet being able to subscribe I wonder if any reader on your side of the water could supply me with copies on a barter basis. There are now two good standard STF magazines published here, "New Worlds" and "Science-Fantasy" and I would send these in exchange, plus any irregular STF magazines which sometimes appear here. I will answer any letters I receive.

Yours faithfully,  
B. G. Puttick  
47 Cumberland Road  
London W. 3  
England.

(Continued on page 113)

# KILL THESE HAIR-DESTROYING GERMS

STAPHYLOCOCCUS  
ALBUS

WITH WARD'S FORMULA

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NOTHING, Absolutely nothing  
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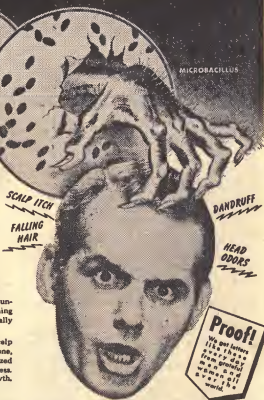
1. Kills these 4 types of germs that retard normal hair growth—on contact
2. Removes ugly infectious dandruff—fast
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I must admit I didn't have much faith in it, but I hadn't been using Ward's one week before I could see it was helping me. I could feel my hair getting thicker.

E. K. Cleveland, Ohio

Out of all the Hair Experts I went to, I've gotten the most help from one bottle of Ward's Formula.

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After using Ward's for only 12 days, my hair has stopped falling out.

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The full force of the mind  
reached out, flowing over  
and into Joel . . .

*"Come and get me!" he thundered  
into the empty vastnesses of space, this  
tiny, earthbound creature who dared to  
challenge the dread, immortal race that had tamed the  
stars . . . and covered in fear as the answer echoed back—*

## EARTHMAN, BEWARE!

**A**S HE neared the cabin, he grew aware that someone was waiting for him.

He paused for a moment, scowling, and sent his perceptions ahead to analyze that flash of knowledge. Something in his brain thrilled to the presence of metal, and there were subtler overtones of the organic—oil

and rubber and plastic . . . he dismissed it as an ordinary small helicopter and concentrated on the faint, maddeningly elusive fragments of thought, nervous energy, life-flows between cells and molecules. There was only one person, and the sketchy outline of his data fitted only a single possibility.

**By POUL ANDERSON**

Margaret.

For another instant he stood quietly, and his primary emotion was sadness. He felt annoyance, perhaps a subtle dismay that his hiding place had finally been located, but mostly it was pity that held him. Poor Peggy. Poor kid.

Well—he'd have to have it out. He straightened his slim shoulders and resumed his walk.

The Alaskan forest was quiet around him. A faint evening breeze rustled the dark pines and drifted past his cheeks, a cool lonesome presence in the stillness. Somewhere birds were twittering as they settled toward rest, and the mosquitoes raised a high, thin buzz as they whirled outside the charmed circle of the odorless repellent he had devised. Otherwise, there was only the low scrunch of his footsteps on the ancient floor of needles. After two years of silence, the vibrations of human presence were like a great shout along his nerves.

When he came out into the little meadow, the sun was going down behind the northern hills. Long aureate rays slanted across the grass, touching the huddled shack with a wizard glow and sending enormous shadows before them. The helicopter was a metallic dazzle against the darkling forest, and he was quite close before his blinded eyes could discern the woman.

She stood in front of the door, waiting, and the sunset turned her hair to ruddy gold. She wore the red sweater and the navy-blue skirt she had worn when they had last been together, and her slim hands were crossed before her. So she had waited for him many times when he came out of the laboratory, quiet as an obedient child. She had never turned her pert vivacity on him, not after noticing how it streamed off his uncomprehending mind like rain off one of the big pines.

He smiled lopsidedly. "Hullo, Peggy," he said, feeling the blind inadequacy of words. But what could he say to her?

"Joel . . ." she whispered.

He saw her start and felt the shock along her nerves. His smile grew more crooked, and he nodded. "Yeah," he said. "I've been bald as an egg all my life. Out here, alone, I had no reason to use a wig."

Her wide hazel eyes searched him. He wore backwoodsman's clothes, plaid shirt and stained jeans and heavy shoes, and he carried a fishing rod and tackle box and a string of perch. But he had not changed, at all. The small slender body, the fine-boned ageless features, the luminous dark eyes under the high forehead, they were all the same. Time had laid no finger on him.

Even the very baldness seemed a completion, letting the strong classic arch of his skull stand forth, stripping away another of the layers of ordinariness with which he had covered himself.

He saw that she had grown thin, and it was suddenly too great an effort to smile. "How did you find me, Peggy?" he asked quietly.

From her first word, his mind leaped ahead to the answer, but he let her say it out. "After you'd been gone six months with no word, we—all your friends, insofar as you ever had any—grew worried. We thought maybe something had happened to you in the interior of China. So we started investigating, with the help of the Chinese government, and soon learned you'd never gone there at all. It had just been a red herring, that story about investigating Chinese archeological sites, a blind to gain time while you—disappeared. I just kept on hunting, even after everyone else had given up, and finally Alaska occurred to me. In Nome I picked up rumors of an odd and unfriendly squatter out in the bush. So I came here."

"Couldn't you just have let me stay vanished?" he asked wearily.

"No." Her voice was trembling with her lips. "Not till I knew for sure, Joel. Not till I knew you were safe and—and—"

He kissed her, tasting salt on her mouth, catching the faint fragrance of her hair. The broken waves of her thoughts and emotions washed over him, swirling through his brain in a tide of loneliness and desolation.

**S**UDDENLY he knew exactly what was going to happen, what he would have to tell her and the responses she would make—almost to the word, he foresaw it, and the futility of it was like a leaden weight on his mind. But he had to go through with it, every wrenching syllable must come out. Humans were that way, groping through a darkness of solitude, calling to each other across abysses and never, never understanding.

"It was sweet of you," he said awkwardly. "You shouldn't have, Peggy, but it was. . . ." His voice trailed off and his prevision failed. There were no words which were not banal and meaningless.

"I couldn't help it," she whispered. "You know I love you."

"Look, Peggy," he said. "This can't go on. We'll have to have it out now. If I tell you who I am, and why I ran away—" He tried to force cheerfulness. "But never have an emotional scene on an empty stomach. Come on in and I'll fry up these fish."

"I will," she said with something of her old spirit. "I'm a better cook than you."

It would hurt her, but: "I'm afraid you couldn't use my equipment, Peggy."

He signaled to the door, and it opened for him. As she preceded him inside, he saw that her face and hands were red with mosquito bites. She must have been waiting a long time for him to come home.

"Too bad you came today," he said desperately. "I'm usually working in here. I just happened to take today off."

She didn't answer. Her eyes were traveling around the cabin, trying to find the immense order that she knew must underlie its chaos of material.

He had put logs and shingles on the outside to disguise it as an ordinary shack.

Within, it might have been his Cambridge laboratory, and she recognized some of the equipment. He had filled a plane with it before leaving. Other things she did not remember, the work of his hands through two lonely years, jungles of wiring and tubing and meters and less understandable apparatus. Only a little of it had the crude, unfinished look of experimental setups. He had been working on some enormous project of his own, and it must be near its end now.

But after that—?"

The gray cat which had been his only real companion, even back in Cambridge, rubbed against her legs with a mew that might be recognition. *A friendlier welcome than he gave me*, she thought bitterly, and then, seeing his grave eyes on her, flushed. It was unjust. She had hunted him out of his self-chosen solitude, and he had been more than decent about it.

Decent—but not human. No unattached human male could have been chased across the world by an attractive woman without feeling more than the quiet regret and pity he showed.

Or did he feel something else? She would never know. No one would ever know all which went on within that beautiful skull. The rest of humanity had too little in common with Joel Weatherfield.

"The rest of humanity?" he asked softly.

She started. That old mind-reading trick of his had been enough to alienate most people. You never knew when he would spring it on you, how much of it was guesswork based on a transcendent logic and how much was—was. . . .

He nodded. "I'm partly telepathic," he said, "and I can fill in the gaps for myself—like Poe's Dupin, only better and easier. There are other things involved too—but never mind that for now. Later."

He threw the fish into a cabinet and adjusted several dials on its face. "Supper coming up," he said.

"So now you've invented the robot chef," she said.

"Saves me work."

"You could make another million dollars or so if you marketed it."

"Why? I have more money right now than any reasonable being needs."

"You'd save people a lot of time, you know."

He shrugged.

She looked into a smaller room where he must live. It was sparsely furnished, a cot and a desk and some shelves holding his enormous microprinted library. In one corner stood the multitone instrument with which he composed the music that no one had ever liked or understood. But he had always found the music of man shallow and pointless. And the art of man and the literature of man and all the works and lives of man.

"How's Langtree coming with his new encephalograph?" he asked, though he could guess the answer. "You were going to assist him on it, I recall."

"I don't know." She wondered if her voice reflected her own weariness. "I've been spending all my time looking, Joel."

He grimaced with pain and turned to the automatic cook. A door opened in it and it slid out a tray with two dishes. He put them on a table and gestured to chairs. "Fall to, Peggy."

In spite of herself, the machine fascinated her. "You must have an induction unit to cook that fast," she murmured, "and I suppose your potatoes and greens are stored right inside it. But the mechanical parts—" She shook her head in baffled wonderment, knowing that a blueprint would have revealed some utterly simple arrangement involving only ingenuity.

Dewed cans of beer came out of another cabinet. He grinned and lifted his. "Man's greatest achievement. Skoal."

She hadn't realized she was so hungry. He ate more slowly, watching her, thinking of the incongruity of Dr. Margaret Logan of M.I.T. wolfing fish and beer in a backwoods Alaskan cabin.

Maybe he should have gone to Mars or some outer-planet satellite. But no, that would have involved leaving a much clearer trail for anyone to follow—you couldn't take off in a spaceship as casually as you could dash over to China. If he had to be found out, he would rather that she did it. For later on she'd keep his secret with the stubborn loyalty he had come to know.

She had always been good to have around, ever since he met her when he was helping M.I.T. on their latest cybernetics work. Twenty-four year old Ph.D.'s with brilliant records were rare enough—when they were also good-looking young women, they became unique. Langtree had been quite hopelessly in love with her, of course. But she had taken on a double program of work, helping Weatherfield at his private laboratories in addition to her usual duties—and she planned to end the latter when her contract expired. She'd been more than useful to him, and he had not been blind to her looks, but it was the same admiration that he had for landscapes and thoroughbred cats and open space. And she had been one of the few humans with whom he could talk at all.

Had been. He exhausted her possibilities in a year, as he drained most people in a month. He had known how she would react to any situation, what she would say to any remark of his, he knew her feelings with a sensitive perception beyond her own knowledge. And the loneliness had returned.

But he hadn't anticipated her finding him, he thought wryly. After planning his flight he had not cared—or dared—to follow out all its logical consequences. Well, he was certainly paying for it now, and so was she.

HE HAD cleared the table and put out coffee and cigarets before they began to talk. Darkness veiled the windows, but his fluorotubes came on automatically. She heard the far faint baying of



a wolf out in the night, and thought that the forest was less alien to her than this room of machines and the man who sat looking at her with that too brilliant gaze.

He had settled himself in an easy chair and the gray cat had jumped up into his lap and lay purring as his thin fingers stroked its fur. She came over and sat on the stool at his feet, laying one hand on his knee. It was useless to suppress impulses when he knew them before she did.

Joel sighed. "Peggy," he said slowly, "you're making a hell of a mistake."

She thought, briefly, how banal his words were, and then remembered that he had always been awkward in speech. It was as if he didn't feel the ordinary human nuances and had to find his way through society by mechanical rote.

He nodded. "That's right," he said.

"But what's the matter with you?" she protested desperately. "I know they all used to call you 'cold fish' and 'brain-heavy'

and 'animated vacuum tube,' but it isn't so. I know you feel more than any of us do, only—only—"

"Only not the same way," he finished gently.

"Oh, you always were a strange sort," she said dully. "The boy wonder, weren't you? Obscure farm kid who entered Harvard at thirteen and graduated with every honor they could give at fifteen. Inventor of the ion-jet space drive, the controlled-disintegration iron process, the cure for the common cold, the crystalline-structure determination of geological age, and only Heaven and the patent office know how much else. Nobel prize-winner in physics for your relativistic wave mechanics. Pioneer in a whole new branch of mathematical series theory. Brilliant writer on archeology, economics, ecology, and semantics. Founder of whole new schools in painting and poetry. What's your I.Q., Joel?"

"How should I know? Above 200 or so,

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I.Q. in the ordinary sense becomes meaningless. I was pretty foolish, Peggy. Most of my published work was done at an early age, out of a childish desire for praise and recognition. Afterward, I couldn't just stop—conditions wouldn't allow it. And of course I had to do something with my time."

"Then at thirty, you pack up and disappear. *Why?*"

"I'd hoped they'd think I was dead," he murmured. "I had a beautiful faked crash in the Gobi, but I guess nobody ever found it. Because poor loyal fools like you just didn't believe I could die. It never occurred to you to look for my remains." His hand passed lightly over her hair, and she sighed and rested her head against his knee. "I should have foreseen that."

"Why in hell I should have fallen in love with a goof like you, I'll never know," she said at last. "Most women ran in fright. Even your money couldn't get them close." She answered her own question with the precision of long thought. "But it was sheer quality, I suppose. After you, everyone else became so trite and insipid." She raised her eyes to him, and there was sudden terrified understanding in them. "And is that why you never married?" she whispered.

He nodded compassionately. Then, slowly, he added, "Also, I'm not too interested in sex yet. I'm still in early adolescence, you know."

"No, I don't know." She didn't move, but he felt her stiffen against him.

"I'm not human," said Joel Weatherfield quietly.

"A mutant? No, you couldn't be." He could feel the tensing of her, the sudden rush of wild thought and wordless nerve current, pulse of blood as the endocrines sought balance on a high taut level of danger. It was the old instinctive dread of the dark and the unknown and the hungry presences beyond a dim circle of firelight—she held herself moveless, but she was an animal bristling in panic.

Calmness came, after a while during which he simply sat stroking her hair. She looked up at him again, forcing herself to meet his eyes.

He smiled as well as he could and said, "No, no, Peggy, all this could never happen in one mutation. I was found in a field of grain one summer morning thirty years ago. A . . . woman . . . who must have been my mother, was lying beside me. They told me later she was of my physical type, and that and the curious iridescent garments she wore made them think she was some circus freak. But she was dead, burned and torn by energies against which she had shielded me with her body. There were only a few crystalline fragments lying around. The people disposed of that and buried her."

"The Weatherfields were an elderly local couple, childless and kindly. I was only a baby, naturally, and they took me in. I grew quite slowly physically, but of course mentally it was another story. They came to be very proud of me in spite of my odd appearance. I soon devised the perfect toupee to cover my hairlessness, and with that and ordinary clothes I've always been able to pass for human. But you may remember I've never let any human see me without shirt and pants on."

"Naturally, I quickly decided where the truth must lie. Somewhere there must be a race, humanoid but well ahead of man in evolution, which can travel between the stars. Somehow my mother and I had been cast away on this desert planet, and in the vastness of the universe any searchers that there may be have never found us."

He fell back into silence. Presently Margaret whispered, "How—human—are you, Joel?"

"Not very," he said with a flash of the old candid smile she remembered. How often had she seen him look up from some piece of work which was going particularly well and give her just that look! "Here, I'll show you."

He whistled, and the cat jumped from

his lap. Another whistle, and the animal was across the room pawing at a switch. Several large plates were released, which the cat carried back in its mouth.

Margaret drew a shaky breath. "I never yet heard of anyone training a cat to run errands."

"This is a rather special cat," he replied absently, and leaned forward to show her the plates. "These are X-rays of myself. You know my technique for photographing different layers of tissue? I developed that just to study myself. I also confess to exhuming my mother's bones, but they proved to be simply a female version of my own. However, a variation of the crystalline-structure method did show that she was at least five hundred years old."

"Five hundred years!"

He nodded. "That's one of several reasons why I'm sure I'm a very young member of my race. Incidentally, her bones showed no sign of age, she corresponded about to a human twenty-five. I don't know whether the natural life span of the race is that great or whether they have artificial means of arresting senility, but I do know that I can expect at least half a millenium of life on Earth. And Earth seems to have a higher gravity than our home world; it's not a very healthy spot for me."

She was too dazed to do more than nod. His finger traced over the X-ray plates. "The skeletal differences aren't too great, but look here and here—the foot, the spine—the skull bones are especially peculiar—Then the internal organs. You can see for yourself that no human being ever had—"

"A double heart?" she asked dully.

"Sort of. It's a single organ, but with more functions than the human heart. Never mind that, it's the neural structure that's most important. Here are several of the brain, taken at different depths and angles."

She fought down a gasp. Her work on encephalography had required a good knowledge of the brain's anatomy. *No human being carries this in his head.*

It wasn't too much bigger than the human. Better organization, she thought; Joel's people would never go insane. There were analogues, a highly convoluted cortex, a medulla, the rest of it. But there were other sections and growths which had no correspondent in any human.

"What are *they*?" she asked.

"I'm not very sure," he replied slowly, a little distastefully. "This one here is what I might call the telepathy center. It's sensitive to neural currents in other organisms. By comparing human reactions and words with the emanations I can detect; I've picked up a very limited degree of telepathy. I can emit, too, but since no human can detect it I've had little use for that power. Then this seems to be for voluntary control of ordinarily involuntary functions—pain blocs, endocrine regulation, and so on—but I've never learned to use it very effectively and I don't dare experiment much on myself. There are other centers—most of them, I don't even know what they're for."

His smile was weary. "You've heard of feral children—the occasional human children who're raised by animals? They never learn to speak, or to exercise any of their specifically human abilities, till they're captured and taught by men. In fact, they're hardly human at all.

"I'm a feral child, Peggy."

She began to cry, deep racking sobs that shook her like a giant's hand. He held her until it passed and she sat again at his knee with the slow tears going down her cheeks. Her voice was a shuddering whisper:

"Oh, my dear, my dear, how lonely you must have been. . . ."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Forgetfulness

**L**ONELY? No human being would ever know how lonely.

It hadn't been too bad at first. As a child, he had been too preoccupied and

delighted with his expanding intellectual horizons to care that the other children bored him—and they, in their turn, heartily disliked Joel for his strangeness and the aloofness they called “snooty.” His foster parents had soon learned that normal standards just didn’t apply to him, they kept him out of school and bought him the books and equipment he wanted. They’d been able to afford that; at the age of six he had patented, in old Weatherfield’s name, improvements on farm machinery that made the family more than well-to-do. He’d always been a “good boy,” as far as he was able. They’d had no cause to regret adopting him, but it had been pathetically like the hen who has hatched ducklings and watches them swim away from her.

The years at Harvard had been sheer heaven, an orgy of learning, of conversations and friendship with the great who came to see an equal in the solemn child. He had had no normal social life then either, but he hadn’t missed it, the undergraduates were dull and a little frightening. He’d soon learned how to avoid most publicity—after all, infant geniuses weren’t altogether unknown. His only real trouble had been with a psychiatrist who wanted him to be more “normal.” He grinned as he remembered the rather fiendish ways in which he had frightened the man into leaving him entirely alone.

But toward the end, he had found limitations in the life. It seemed utterly pointless to sit through lectures on the obvious and to turn in assignments of problems which had been done a thousand times before. And he was beginning to find the professors a little tedious, more and more he was able to anticipate their answers to his questions and remarks, and those answers were becoming ever more trite.

He had long been aware of what his true nature must be, though he had had the sense not to pass the information on. Now the dream began to grow in him: To find his people!

What was the use of everything he did, when their children must be playing with the same forces as toys, when his greatest discoveries would be as old in their culture as fire in man’s? What pride did he have in his achievements, when none of the witless animals who saw them could say “Well done!” as it should be said? What comradeship could he ever know with blind and stupid creatures who soon became as predictable as his machines? *With whom could he think?*

He flung himself savagely into work, with the simple goal of making money. It hadn’t been hard. In five years he was a multimillionaire, with agents to relieve him of all the worry and responsibility, with freedom to do as he chose. To work for escape.

*How weary, flat, stale and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world!*

But not of every world! Somewhere, somewhere out among the grand host of the stars. . . .

THE long night wore on.

“Why did you come here?” asked Margaret. Her voice was quiet now, muted with hopelessness.

“I wanted secrecy. And human society was getting to be more than I could stand.”

She winced, then: “Have you found a way to build a faster-than-light spaceship?”

“No. Nothing I’ve ever discovered indicates any way of getting around Einstein’s limitation. There must be a way, but I just can’t find it. Not too surprising, really. Our feral child would probably never be able to duplicate ocean-going ships.”

“But how do you ever hope to get out of the Solar System, then?”

“I thought of a robot-manned spaceship going from star to star, with myself in suspended animation.” He spoke of it as casually as a man might describe some scheme for repairing a leaky faucet. “But it was utterly impractical. My people can’t live anywhere near, or we’d have had more indication of them than one shipwreck. They

may not live in this galaxy at all. I'll save that idea for a last resort."

"But you and your mother must have been in some kind of ship. Wasn't anything ever found?"

"Just those few glassy fragments I mentioned. It makes me wonder if my people use spaceships at all. Maybe they have some sort of matter transmitter. No, my main hope is some kind of distress signal which will attract help."

"But if they live so many light-years away—"

"I've discovered a strange sort of—well, you might call it radiation, though it has no relation to the electromagnetic spectrum. Energy fields vibrating a certain way produce detectable effects in a similar setup well removed from the first. It's roughly analogous to the old spark-gap radio transmitters. The important thing is that these effects are transmitted with no measurable time lag or diminution with distance."

She would have been aflame with wonder in earlier times. Now she simply nodded. "I see. It's a sort of ultrawave. But if there are no time or distance effects, how can it be traced? It'd be completely non-directional, unless you could beam it."

"I can't—yet. But I've recorded a pattern of pulses which are to correspond to the arrangement of stars in this part of the galaxy. Each pulse stands for a star, its intensity for the absolute brightness, and its time separation from the other pulses for the distance from the other stars."

"But that's a one-dimensional representation, and space is three dimensional."

"I know. It's not as simple as I said. The problem of such representation was an interesting problem in applied topology—took me a good week to solve. You might be interested in the mathematics, I've got my notes here somewhere—But anyway, my people, when they detect those pulses, should, easily be able to deduce what I'm trying to say. I've put Sol at the head of each series of pulses, so they'll even know

what particular star it is that I'm at. Anyway, there can only be one or a few configurations exactly like this in the universe, so I've given them a fix. I've set up an apparatus to broadcast my call automatically. Now I can only wait."

"How long have you waited?"

He scowled. "A good year now—and no sign. I'm getting worried. Maybe I should try something else."

"Maybe they don't use your ultrawave at all. It might be obsolete in their culture."

He nodded. "It could well be. But what else is there?"

She was silent.

Presently Joel stirred and sighed. "That's the story, Peggy."

She nodded, mutely.

"Don't feel sorry for me," he said. "I'm doing all right. My research here is interesting, I like the country, I'm happier than I've been for a long time."

"That's not saying much, I'm afraid," she answered.

"No, but—Look, Peggy, you know what I am now. A monster. More alien to you than an ape. It shouldn't be hard to forget me."

"Harder than you think, Joel. I love you. I'll always love you."

"But—Peggy, it's ridiculous. Just suppose that I did come live with you. There could never be children . . . but I suppose that doesn't matter too much. We'd have nothing in common, though. Not a thing. We couldn't talk, we couldn't share any of the million little things that make a marriage, we could hardly even work together. I can't live in human society any more, you'd soon lose all your friends, you'd become as lonely as I. And in the end you'd grow old, your powers would fade and die, and I'd still be approaching my maturity. Peggy, neither of us could stand it."

"I know."

"Langtree is a fine man. It'd be easy to love him. You've no right to withhold a



heredity as magnificent as yours from your race."

"You may be right."

He put a hand under her chin and tilted her face up to his. "I have some powers over the mind," he said slowly. "With your cooperation, I could adjust your feelings about this."

She tensed back from him, her eyes wide and frightened. "No—"

"Don't be a fool. It would only be doing now what time will do anyway." His smile was tired, crooked. "I'm really a remarkably easy person to forget, Peggy."

His will was too strong. It radiated from him, in the lambent eyes and the delicately carved features that were almost human, it pulsed in great drowsy waves from his telepathic brain and seemed almost to flow through the thin hands. Useless to resist, futile to deny—give up, give up and sleep. she was so tired.

She nodded, finally. Joel smiled the old smile she knew so well. He began to talk.

She never remembered the rest of the night, save as a blur of half awareness, a soft voice that whispered in her head, a face dimly seen through wavering mists. Once, she recalled, there was a machine that clicked and hummed, and little lights flashing and spinning in darkness. Her memory was stirred, roiled like a quiet pool, things she had forgotten through most of her life floated to the surface. It seemed as if her mother was beside her.

In the vague foggy dawn, he let her go. There was a deep unhuman calm in her, she looked at him with something of a sleepwalker's empty stare and her voice was flat. It would pass, she would soon become normal again, but Joel Weatherfield would be a memory with little emotional color, a ghost somewhere in the back of her mind.

A ghost. He felt utterly tired, drained of strength and will. He didn't belong here, he was a shadow that should have been flitting between the stars, the sunlight of Earth erased him.

"Good-by, Peggy," he said. "Keep my secret. Don't let anyone know where I am. And good luck go with you all your days."

"Joel—" She paused on the doorstep, a puzzled frown crossing her features. "Joel, if you can think at me that way, can't your people do the same?"

"Of course. What of it?" For the first time, he didn't know what was coming, he had changed her too much for prediction.

"Just that—why should they bother with gadgets like your ultrawave for talking to each other? They should be able to think between the stars."

He blinked. It had occurred to him, but he had not thought much beyond it, he had been too preoccupied with his work.

"Good-by, Joel." She turned and walked away through the dripping gray fog. An early sunbeam struck through a chance rift and glanced off her hair. He stood in the doorway until she was gone.

**H**E SLEPT through most of the day. Awakening, he began to think over what had been said.

By all that was holy, Peggy was right! He had immersed himself too deeply in the purely technical problems of the ultrawave, and since then in mathematical research which passed the time of waiting, to stand off and consider the basic logic of the situation. But this—it made sense.

He had only the vaguest notion of the inherent powers of his own mind. Physical science had offered too easy an outlet for him. Nor could he, unaided, hope to get far in such studies. A human feral child might have the heredity of a mathematical genius, but unless he was found and taught by his own kind he would never comprehend the elements of arithmetic—or of speech or sociability or any of the activities which set man off from the other animals. There was just too long a heritage of prehuman and early human development for one man, alone, to recapitulate in a lifetime, when his environment held no indication of the

particular road his ancestors had taken.

But those idle nerves and brain centers must be for something. He suspected that they were means of direct control over the most basic forces in the universe. Telepathy, telekinesis, precognition—what godlike heritage had been denied him?

At any rate, it did seem that his race had gone beyond the need of physical mechanisms. With complete understanding of the structure of the space-time-energy continuum, with control by direct will of its underlying processes, they would project themselves or their thoughts from star to star, create what they needed by sheer thought—and pay no attention to the gibberings of lesser races.

Fantastic, dizzying prospect! He stood breathless before the great shining vision that opened to his eyes.

He shook himself back to reality. The immediate problem was getting in touch with his race. That meant a study of the telepathic energies he had hitherto almost ignored.

He plunged into a fever of work. Time became meaningless, a succession of days and nights, waning light and drifting snow and the slow return of spring. He had never had much except his work to live for, now it devoured the last of his thoughts. Even during the periods of rest and exercise he forced himself to take, his mind was still at the problem, gnawing at it like a dog with a bone. And slowly, slowly, knowledge grew.

**T**ELEPATHY was not directly related to the brain pulses measured by encephalography. Those were feeble, short-range by-products of neuronic activity. Telepathy, properly controlled, leaped over any intervening space with an arrogant ignoring of time. It was, he decided, another part of what he had labeled the ultrawave spectrum, which was related to gravitation as an effect of the geometry of space-time. But, while gravitational effects were pro-

duced by the presence of matter, ultrawave effects came into being when certain energy fields vibrated. However they did not appear unless there was a properly tuned receiver somewhere. They seemed somehow "aware" of a listener even before they came into existence. That suggested fascinating speculations about the nature of time, but he turned away from it. His people would know more about it than he could ever find out alone.

But the concept of waves was hardly applicable to something that traveled with an "infinite velocity"—a poor term semantically, but convenient. He could assign an ultrawave a frequency, that of the generating energy fields, but then the wavelength would be infinite. Better to think of it in terms of tensors, and drop all pictorial analogies.

His nervous system did not itself contain the ultra-energies. Those were omnipresent, inherent in the very structure of the cosmos. But his telepathy centers, properly trained, were somehow coupled to that great underlying flow, they could impose the desired vibrations on it. Similarly, he supposed, his other centers could control those forces to create or destroy or move matter, to cross space, to scan the past and future probability-worlds, to . . .

He couldn't do it himself. He just couldn't find out enough in even his lifetime. Were he literally immortal, he might still never learn what he had to know; his mind had been trained into human thought patterns, and this was something that lay beyond man's power of comprehension.

*But all I need is to send one clear call. . . .*

He struggled with it. Through the endless winter nights he sat in the cabin and fought to master his brain. How did you send a shout to the stars?

Tell me, feral child, how do you solve a partial differential equation?

Perhaps some of the answer lay in his own mind. The brain has two types of memory, the "permanent" and the "circu-

lating," and apparently the former kind is never lost. It recedes into the subconscious, but it is still there, and it can be brought out again. As a child, a baby, he would have observed things, remembered sights of apparatus and feelings of vibration, which his more mature mind could now analyze.

He practiced autohypnosis, using a machine he devised to help him, and the memories came back, memories of warmth and light and great pulsing forces. Yes—yes, there was an engine of some sort, he could see it thrumming and flickering before him. It took a while before he could translate the infant's alien impressions into his present sensory evaluations, but when that job was done he had a clear picture of—something.

That helped, just a little. It suggested certain types of hookup, empirical patterns which had not occurred to him before. And now slowly, slowly, he began to make progress.

An ultrawave demands a receiver for its very existence. So he could not flash a thought to any of his people unless one of them happened to be listening on that particular "wave"—its pattern of frequency, modulation, and other physical characteristics. And his untrained mind simply did not send on that "band." He couldn't do it, he couldn't imagine the wave-form of his race's normal thought. He was faced with a problem similar to that of a man in a foreign country who must invent its language for himself before he can communicate—without even being allowed to listen to it, and knowing only that its phonetic, grammatical, and semantic values are entirely different from those of his native speech.

Insoluble? No, maybe not. His mind lacked the power to send a call out through the stars, lacked the ability to make itself intelligible. But a machine has no such limitations.

He could modify his ultrawave; it already had the power, and he could give it the coherence. For he could insert a random factor in it, a device which would vary the

basic wave-form in every conceivable permutation of characteristics, running through millions or billions of tries in a second—and the random wave could be modulated too, his own thoughts could be superimposed. Whenever the machine found resonance with anything that could receive—anything, literally, for millions of light-years—an ultrawave would be generated and the random element cut off. Joel could stay on that band then, examining it at his leisure.

Sooner or later, one of the bands he hit would be that of his race. And he would know it.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Contact

THE device, when he finished, was crude and ugly, a great ungainly thing of tangled wires and gleaming tubes and swirling cosmic energies. One lead from it connected to a metal band around his own head, imposing his basic ultrawave pattern on the random factor and feeding back whatever was received into his brain. He lay on his bunk, with a control panel beside him, and started the machine working.

Vague mutterings, sliding shadows, strangeness rising out of the roiled depths of his mind. . . . He grinned thinly, battling down the cold apprehension which rose in his abused nerves, and began experimenting with the machine. He wasn't too sure of all its characteristics himself, and it would take a while too before he had full control of his thought-pattern.

Silence, darkness, and now and then a glimpse, a brief blinding instant when the random gropings struck some basic resonance and a wave sprang into being and talked to his brain. Once he looked through Margaret's eyes, across a table to Langtree's face. There was candlelight, he remembered afterward, and a small string orchestra was playing in the background. Once he saw

the ragged outlines of a city men had never built, rising up toward a cloudy sky while a strangely slow and heavy sea lapped against its walls.

Once, too, he did catch a thought flashing between the stars. But it was no thought of his kind, it was a great white blaze like a sun exploding in his head, and cold, cold. He screamed aloud, and for a week afterward dared not resume his experiments.

In the springtime dusk, he found his answer.

The first time, the shock was so great that he lost contact again. He lay shaking, forcing calm on himself, trying to reproduce the exact pattern his own brain, as well as the machine, had been sending. Easy, easy—The baby's mind had been drifting in a mist of dreams, *thus*. . .

The baby. For his groping, uncontrollable brain could not resonate with any of the superbly trained adult minds of his people.

But a baby has no spoken language. Its mind slides amorphously from one pattern to another, there are no habits as yet to fix it, and one tongue is as good as any other. By the laws of randomness, Joel had struck the pattern which an infant of his race happened to be giving out at the moment.

He found it again, and the tingling warmth of contact flowed into him, deliciously, marvelously, a river in a dusty desert, a sun warming the chill of the solipsistic loneliness in which humans wandered from their births to the end of their brief meaningless lives. He fitted his mind to the baby's, let the two streams of consciousness flow into one, a river running toward the mighty sea of the race.

*The feral child crept out of the forest. Wolves howled at his back, the hairy four-footed brothers of cave and chase and darkness, but he heard them not. He bent over the baby's cradle, the tangled hair falling past his gaunt witless face, and looked with a dim stirring of awe and wonder. The baby spread its hand, a little soft starfish, and*

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*his own gnarled fingers stole toward it, trembling at the knowledge that this was a paw like his own.*

Now he had only to wait until some adult looked into the child's mind. It shouldn't be, long, and meanwhile he rested in the timeless drowsy peace of the very young.

Somewhere in the outer cosmos, perhaps on a planet swinging about a sun no one of Earth would ever see, the baby rested in a cradle of warm, pulsing forces. He did not have a room around him, there was a shadowiness which no human could ever quite comprehend, lit by flashes of the energy that created the stars.

The baby sensed the nearing of something that meant warmth and softness, sweetness in his mouth and murmuring in his mind. He cooed with delight, reaching his hands out into the shaking twilight of the room. His mother's mind ran ahead of her, folding about the little one.

A scream!

Frantically, Joel reached for her mind, flashing and flashing the pattern of location-pulses through the baby's brain into hers. He lost her, his mind fell sickeningly in on itself—no, no, someone else was reaching for him now, analyzing the pattern of the machine and his own wild oscillations and fitting smoothly into them.

A deep, strong voice in his brain, somehow unmistakably male—Joel relaxed, letting the other mind control his, simply emitting his signals.

It would take—them—a little while to analyze the meaning of his call. Joel lay in a half conscious state, aware of one small part of the being's mind maintaining a thread of contact with him while the rest reached out, summoning others across the universe, calling for help and information.

So he had won. Joel thought of Earth, dreamily and somehow wistfully. Odd that in this moment of triumph his mind should dwell on the little things he was leaving behind—an Arizona sunset, a nightingale under the moon, Peggy's flushed face bent

over an instrument beside his. Beer and music and windy pines.

*But O my people! Never more to be lonely. . . .*

Decision. A sensation of falling, rushing down, a vortex of stars toward Sol—approach!

The being would have to locate him on Earth. Joel tried to picture a map, though the thought-patterns that corresponded in his brain to a particular visualization would not make sense to the other. But in some obscure way, it might help.

Maybe it did. Suddenly the telepathic band snapped, but there was a rush of other impulses, life forces like flame, the nearness of a god. Joel stumbled gasping to his feet and flung open the door.

THE moon was rising above the dark hills, a hazy light over trees and patches of snow and the wet ground. The air was chill and damp, sharp in his lungs.

The being who stood there, outlined in the radiance of his garments, was taller than Joel, an adult. His grave eyes were too brilliant to meet, it was as if the life within him were incandescent. And when the full force of his mind reached out, flowing over and into Joel, running along every nerve and cell of him. . . .

He cried out with the pain of it and fell to his hands and knees. The intolerable force lightened, faded to a thrumming in his brain that shook every fiber of it. He was being studied, analyzed, no tiniest part of him was hidden from those terrible eyes and from the logic that recreated more of him than he knew himself. His own distorted telepathic language was at once intelligible to the watcher, and he croaked his appeal.

The answer held pity, but it was as remote and inexorable as the thunders on Olympus.

*Child, it is too late. Your mother must*

*(Continued on page 110)*



# MUTATION

By Lilith Lorraine

*His mother bore him in the nuclear dawn,  
Deep in a cave beneath an iron sky,  
Lit by strange suns and moons that rose awry  
And set at man's command. All things were pawn  
To man except himself, and he was slave  
To his own passions. Where the last bombs fell  
He cowered deep within his steel-walled cell,  
And mouldered in his radioactive grave.*

*And he whose sire had lived with sun and shower,  
Walked shambling where the great wheels noiseless droned,  
Serving the dimming mind, the beast enthroned,  
Waiting the last inevitable hour.*

*The monster clenched six fists beneath the sky,  
Cursed with two mouths and glared with one red eye.*



# OBLIVION QUEST

"The world's dead, so why should we keep on living. . . ."



By WILBUR S. PEACOCK

*On a blasted, dying Earth they molded Man's yesterdays—three inhuman creatures, whose only tie to humanity was a deathless hatred for those who gave them birth!*

BILL stirred lazily at the stream's edge, amusing himself by trying to snare a red-winged fish with the looped tip of his tail. He had fine control of the appendage ordinarily, but the fish were too fast and slippery, and the hairless appendage could not grasp. But he persist-

ed, barely conscious of Ted and Andy at his back, still working at the machine.

Jim divided his attention evenly between Bill and the working men, nictilian lids dropped against the glare of the midday sun. His paws were folded across his scaly chest, and his gill covers stirred uneasily, even though he was now breathing air.

"You think it will work, Bill?" he asked suddenly. "You ask me, I think Andy is crazy."

"Damn!" Bill said and snatched his tail from the rilling water. Tiny teeth marks were on the pink flesh, oozing green blood. He waved the tail slowly in the air, easing the pain, before answering. "Who knows," he finally admitted. "I'm a warrior, not a scientist. My job is to kill Barkell—not figure a way to get at him!"

"You guys talk too much," Ted telepathed in sudden biting anger. "You should be helping us."

He fitted a base panel of shining quartz into place with his lower hands, the two other pairs steadying and locking the base into place. Then he scurried back on spider legs, his body-head dome tilting a bit as he studied the cube which was almost finished.

"Phooey!" Bill said, and ate a handful of wild nasturtiums. "What the hell do we know about time travel and time machines!" He patted the disintegrator gun at his waist. "The only machine I know is Betsy here, and I don't want to know any other."

Andy scowled with his left head, his right intent on the electrical connections he was trailing from the huge dis-battery to the cube's outlets. His left head's single eye frowned in contempt. Bill shrugged; scientists always thought they were better than a warrior.

"Well, we are," Andy's right head lifted and said.

"Bellywash!" Bill said, and began fishing again, his tail's tip darting through the water after the restless fish. "If it weren't for the warriors, you'd all be dead."

"We will be, anyway, unless this works," Ted telepathed from his mouthless, eyeless body-head. "The plague's moving from the craters like a grass fire, and nothing can stop it."

"So we die," Jim hissed, his forked tongue flicking at flies. "Hell, the world's dead, so why should we keep on living!"

Despite themselves, they all looked across the plains at the great glittering field of crystallized earth which was the limit of their domain to the west. There had the bombs ripped and smashed and glowed in the birth pangs of begetting death. There no man could live, not even now, for nothing could grow in the glassy earth, and rays, while weak, still struggled upward in a miasma of waiting agony.

And thus it was across the world, for man in his last gush of suicide had loosed the power of the sun in a war which had cleansed the earth of its crawling life almost entirely. Two weeks had the war lasted, hate and fear and destruction spreading like a mold over everything. Cities had vanished, and towns, and villages, and out of billions only a few million had survived, hiding like slugs in caverns, murdering for the few remains which made life possible, crawling like maggots about a corpse, intent only on living, forgetting all else.

And so the years had passed, and decades, and centuries; and the final war became history, and then a legend, and then an old-wives' tale and was finally forgotten. A few things remained, scattered in destructible weapons, a few books printed on better paper—but which the average man could not read—and the will to exist which would be the last to go. There were other things, of course, but they had vanished, or their uses forgotten, through the centuries. Life existed, but no two things were alike, for bomb bursts had set genetic patterns awry.

Civilization had wearily lifted its head, but differently now, a thing of colonies, of

anarchy, where warriors dominated all. Most did not think, they existed—and when a man became a thinker, he became a thing of suspicion, to be driven away from normal creatures.

Andy had been one of those, for his twin brain had given him the strange sense of rationalizing many things. He had learned to read, as though the ability was a racial instinct brought to the surface. He had rooted out and digested many books, and from his reading had come a thought, a wild improbable idea, born of desire and the plague and a thousand reborn memories of times he had never seen.

Ted had been the catalyst which exploded the idea into existence. From his refuge at the east of the glowing plains where men had driven him because he too could think, he had telepathed a message to Andy and drawn him to safety. Ahead of hunting warriors, Andy had come, there to hide and plan, the precious crumbling manuscript of a vanished scientist clutched tightly in one hand. They had come together, he and Ted, and when the plague of the glowing lands struck full force, they were ready with their plan.

Jim had been their first recruit, his scaly body quiescent, his reptilian eyes quartz-cold, as he listened. Not that he cared about the other people, but that he wished to live.

"It is all here," Andy had explained, and tapped a decayed book, made of some ancient skin and written in an ink which only complete dissolution could erase. "There truly was a final war. There were more people on Earth than there are leaves in a forest. They fought on the land and in the air and in and on the water. I do not understand why they fought, for this writer does not say. But they slew each other with a weapon so terrible that nothing could stand in its way.

"They fought and they died, and the world died with them. They had everything they needed for existence, and still they fought."

Andy shuddered delicately, his heads turning toward each other in mutual horror, while Jim watched, his body half in the water, his gill covers opening and closing in gentle fluctuations.

"And what must I do?" he hissed.

AND they told him, told him of the things which must still lie in the drowned city beside the ocean. Metals were there, and crystal and quartz and many other things which could be used. With those, and with the knowledge Andy possessed, Ted could fashion the machine whose creator was vanished dust, whose purpose had never been tested, whose existence now might save a world which would live no longer than it would take the death from the glowing plains to sweep wherever people still clustered.

"It is a chance," Andy explained patiently, for Jim was not a true thinker. He was a reptile-man and his thought processes were slow. "This writing is of a machine with which a man can travel in time."

He saw Jim's reaction as the thought slowly penetrated, and then he sensed that full understanding had not come. So he explained further.

"Time and the past are fluid," he said, seeking for simple words. "If a man could travel into the past, he could change the future, which is the present. The future is a thing which can be changed by anybody. A murder, an accident, a decision to mate with somebody else, all of those set up a history pattern. Each is different, and yet each is co-related, for all deal with a stream of existence which must some day reach a common end."

"I don't understand," Jim said.

But Bill did. He was not a thinker, but he was a warrior and so his mental processes were on a higher level than Jim's.

"You mean I go back somewhere and kill this Barkell—and there is no war, and we live in a different world, and none of us will die from the plague?" he asked.

"That's it," Andy agreed. "This machine, if it works, will take you to a time before the final war. It will place you in conjunction with this man Barkell. You will shoot him to death with your hand weapon—and thus he cannot invent the ultimate weapon with which humanity was enabled to destroy itself in a final war."

Bill frowned, wrinkling his furry cheeks. "I don't get it," he said finally. "I'm supposed to kill him with a weapon—which he will not be able to invent if he dies."

They sat in silence, while Andy's two heads communed silently. Then Andy shrugged.

"I don't understand it, either," he admitted. "But it has to work. It's our only chance for survival." He spread his hands. "This writer talks about parallel lines of existence, but I don't really understand. Maybe if you succeed, we'll be alive here, but with the world no longer blown to hell. Maybe we'll live as other people, not knowing a thing of what has gone in the past. I don't know, and I don't really care. What I do know is that man is doomed now, for there is no fighting the plague."

Bill ate a handful of grass, thinking, but really absorbing nothing of what he had heard. Killing was his business, and it seemed logical that killing a menace might make him safer.

"Why me?" he said at last.

"Because you must be more like those humans who lived then than any of the rest of us. You've one head and two arms and two legs, and the men then looked like that. I've read of clothes, but I don't know what they are."

"I do, huh?" Bill said, admiring his body in the pool. He arched his tail and ruffled the fur along his back. He winked his eyes and bared his yellow fangs, and was pleased with what he saw. So those vanished people had looked like him, eh!

"What do I do, huh?" he asked.

"We'll build this machine, Ted and I,"

Andy said. "We've got the instructions. 'Course, we're not certain the thing will work, but it's worth the try. Anyway, we'll build the machine and you'll get into it. When it stops, you get out and look up this Barkell, who should be nearby, if calculations work out. Kill him and then return to the machine, which will bring you back."

Bill rippled his satiny fur. "Maybe it'll kill me," he said.

"Maybe," Andy agreed. "Afraid?"

Bill shrugged. "I saw a man with the plague," he said. "He just slumped down into pulp. I'm more afraid of that."

THAT, of course, had been weeks before. Now the machine grew from the rocky ground in glittering splendor. It was a cube; yet the lines somehow merged and flowed and seemed to lack solidity. It was hollow, and except for a small control box the size of a fist, empty. A bladelike switch would activate the machine, a fingertip pressure all that was needed to move it.

Ted worked at it now, fitting the electrical leads. Gold they were, crudely made and extruded from metal Jim had found in a sunken city. Ted's hands worked competently, for his mutation line had followed one wherein all was sacrificed for delicacy of movement.

A pale wind stirred in the glowing lands, and its heat thrust at the four men clustered about the machine. Faint and far away could be heard the signalling of sending drums of the people. They were moving, going blindly, only hoping to leave the horror of the plague behind.

Andy listened for a moment, then turned back to the machine. Jim watched from cold sleepy eyes, then turned and vanished without a sound into the stream which led to the ocean. He was hungry, and the stunted weird fish were waiting. His share in this was over, and he felt no curiosity as to the outcome.



Bill watched Jim disappear, then ceased his futile fishing with his tail.

He drew the dis-gun at his waist and idly aimed it about, liking its feel. Some day, but not in his lifetime, the energy would drain from the small coil at its butt. Until that time, he was master of all men.

He speculated upon the thought that he would kill a man already long dead. But the thought made no sense, and so he discarded it, content in the knowledge that no matter where he was, nothing could stand against him and the gun.

And Ted, moving about on his spider legs, was strangely content. He was a builder in a world where nothing was created. He cared little about the world as it was now, and its future meant nothing to him. Philosophy was for men like Andy, with their books and theories and worries about men still not born. He would have liked living in the age of which Andy could speak so brilliantly. Men created then, built with their hands and brains, and in that age he would have been supreme. And maybe, he permitted himself the thought, if this experiment succeeded, he would be a builder and creator in this new age.

Andy, watching the final tie-in of the leads to the glowing cube, felt the urgency of panic-doubt in his twin minds. Men must live, he knew. Their destiny lay further than a shining pool of protoplasm into which the plague was turning them. They must survive and grow and live and . . .

He sighed, barely conscious that Jim was gone. Ted was almost through now, but one lead to connect. Then must come the desperate gamble. It must succeed, it would succeed. If the machine worked, then Bill would snuff out the existence of the man who had created this nightmare of the future. When he died, then the weapon could not be invented; and without that invention, a line of parallel existence-history would be created. The world and the future and its people would live.

"It's ready," Ted telepathed then.

"Good!" Bill came lithely to his feet, holstering the gun. "I was getting a bit fidgety. What do I do?"

Andy strode forward and lifted the top panel of the crystal cube. Perspiration was on his faces, and his heads touched as though in mutual sympathy.

"You get in the cube and close it up," he said, "When you're ready, push that control forward. If everything works, you'll arrive in Barkell's time and but a short distance from where he is. When you want to return, you just reverse the process. Remember the machine can make but one round trip, so don't make any mistakes."

"I won't," Bill promised, and came to the cube, pausing. "I'll know this Barkell?"

Andy nodded. "You have his body index implanted in your mind by hypnosis. You can make no mistake. When you see him, you'll automatically recognize him. Shoot, then, shoot to kill, and then return."

"All right," Bill said, and slid into the cube.

He slipped the top panel into place. He could see out now, but all was distorted. He settled himself, then reached for the switch. Without thought, without hesitation, he thrust the tiny prong forward.

There was no sound. Ted and Andy had stepped back, caught by the blind urgency of the moment. They saw Bill sink into place and the cube close. Like watching a swimmer in deep water, they saw his hand come forward and move the switch.

Air shimmered and the cube seemed to settle. A breeze stirred, air rushing in to close the semi-vacuum. The cube and Bill were gone, and from far across the land the people's drums beat like the soft susurrations of waves against a cliff.

HERE was terror, here was something such as Bill had never thought existed. This was a world he could not understand. Trees grew almost to the sky, branches spreading fan-

tastically. The earth was soft and dry, and the grass was long and thick and furry, not as it was in his time. The air was cool, and there were a thousand unknown odors.

But he was a warrior, and so he went forward, leaving the cube where it had appeared in the small glade. He glided through the shadows, gun in his hand.

A rabbit stirred, and the dis-gun hummed, blasting it from existence. Almost paralyzed with shock at its rude appearance, Bill gritted his teeth and went forward. Slowly courage returned, as knowledge of the power of his gun filled his mind.

He came to the edge of the trees and looked across the cleared ground at the house. It was blocky and terrifying in the night; and he did not understand its purpose. But he could see light within, and so he judged people must be there, although how lamps could create such light, he did not know.

And inside the house Barkell sat at his desk and propped his aching head with chemical-stained hands. Three men watched inscrutably, plain ordinary men, yet creatures who held the destiny of a world in their grasp.

"It won't work," Barkell said tiredly, stupidly. "I've gone over my formulae a thousand times. There is a factor missing, and I can't find it."

The first watcher grunted softly.

"You'll find it," he said. "Good Lord, Barkell, you have to. If you fail us now, then we'll be wiped out."

The second man nodded. "Total war is but months away," he said through thin lips. "We must have your weapon."

Barkell shook his head. "I'm quitting," he said. "I'm whipped." His hand smashed at the blueprints on the desk. "It's pure theory, nothing more."

The third man stirred. "We've put fifteen million in that theory, Barkell. We'll put more if need be. But you'll turn out that weapon."

"I can't," Barkell cried from a haggard face. "I've tried, but I can't do it. Something's missing, and I can't find it."

The second man said: "Barkell, I'm warning—"

Outside, Bill leaped lithely to the window sill. For a moment sheer horror at the sight of the identical monsters within held him rigid. Then his subconscious mind recognized Barkell, and he raised his gun.

The shot blasted echoes in the room, and the bullet caught Bill squarely through the chest. He was going forward, and the bullet twisted him aside. His dis-gun hummed, and the back wall of the building dissolved and vanished without sound. One instant it was there, and the next, gone.

The first man sucked in a deep breath, still watching the body. He didn't know the rear wall was gone, none knew it, yet.

"Hell," he said. "I'm sorry. I saw the gun and I thought it was an assassination attempt." He gazed at the body below. "I'm sorry about your monkey."

Barkell had discovered the rear wall was gone now, and despite the blind unreality of the moment, he came about the desk and bent over the body. Two foot tall it was, maybe less, and there was a belt about its waist, and the miniature squat gun lay close to the black hand.

Gingerly he picked up the gun, inadvertently touching the firing stud. The desk and its papers and the chair and the rear of the floor vanished almost without sound.

"Oh, my Lord!" he whispered, and he examined the dis-gun with the sense that he was catching glimpses of a dream half-remembered.

"What is it?" the second man said.

"It's my weapon—but changed, altered!" Perspiration broke on Barkell's head. "It—it works!"

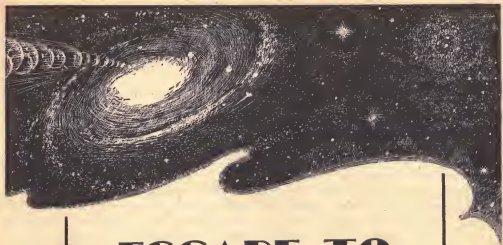
"But you said—"

"Look," he cried, "that coil is energized by the—"

Barkell had found his weapon, and now the future of the world was assured.



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# ESCAPE TO CHAOS

By JOHN D. MacDONALD

*At bay against his dissolving skies he fought—the last  
champion of a star-spanning dynasty which never  
existed—save to die!*

THE third son of Shain, the rebel son, the traitor to Empire, was pursued thrice across the Galaxy, was trapped five times and five times he escaped. Now he stood in the blue and eternal dusk of a cobalt city on Zeran, one of the old planets, a planet of many histories, of many peoples, of the sadness of things lost beyond regaining. Zeran kept its face always toward the vast pink-orange sun that bore it, a half billion miles away.

Three years before, Shain had listened to the reports of the activities of his third son, Andro. Shain lay on the couch and ate

of the fruit the women had brought him. He listened. "Andro said to Telka of Vereen, 'How long will you permit my father to oppress you?' Andro said to Clahgaron of Lell, 'When the uprising comes, you must be ready to join us.'"

"Enough!" Shain said in the voice of Empire. He dropped seeds to the soft amber floor, selected another fruit. There was a small wet sound as he bit into it. He chewed, swallowed, yawned. "Have him killed," he said languidly.

Three years later Andro stood alone in the dusk of the city of endless blue. He

stood alone with heavy shoulders braced against the wall at the end of a forgotten alley. His burns suppurated and they weakened him, but his hand was firm on the grip of the weapon. Forty ships there were, and now there were none. Seven thousand had pledged their loyalty beyond death, and of the seven thousand the last one, the girl, Daylya, had died as he dragged her from the ruin of the last ship.

He was a big man and he waited with a big man's patience. He waited and it was hate that gave him the strength to stand against his hurt. Once he smiled as he thought of what it had cost them. Four times seven thousand. Five times forty ships. Rumor among all the planets of Empire would make those totals greater. The deeds of Andro would be whispered in quiet places. And one day another one would dare, and win. Andro had shown them, shown all of them that revolt, even unsuccessful revolt, was possible, and to many it would seem a good way to die.

The wars of nations on ancient earth had been the rationalization for the founding of what had become galactic empire. For centuries as man had exploded across the star wastes, Empire had been weak. And then when the galactic wars began, star against star, cluster against cluster, Empire had regained its old strength merely by seeming necessary.

And the House of Galvan had ruled Empire for several thousand years. Shain of Galvan was no better and no worse than the average, Andro knew. The House of Galvan had not permitted itself to become weak. The men went to the far wild planets to find the strong-thighed mothers of Empire. The men of the House of Galvan were big. But the House had ruled too long. They had ruled from a time of enlightenment through to a time of superstition and stagnation. Andro, the youngest son, had not been as cleverly and carefully indoctrinated into the mores of Empire as his eldest brother, Larrent, as the middle

brother, Masec. He had read much, of the olden times. Then, steeped in the rich traditions of early days, he had looked around him.

He had seen the prancing perfumed artists, claiming an ultimate reality in incomprehensible daubs. He had visited the slave markets of Simpar and Chaigan, and had been sickened. He had seen that the ships were old ships, the weapons old weapons, and the old songs forgotten. He had seen the dusty rotting machines that had been the hope of man, while ten thousand laborers built, by hand and whip, a temple to the glory of the House of Galvan.

And he had said, "This is the dark age of Empire. We have had enough."

Even as youngest son in the great palaces and fortifications of the heart of Empire, on the green and gold planet called Rael at the heart of the Galaxy, he had only to raise a languid hand to acquire forty slave women, the rarest of wines, or the tax-tribute of a dozen planets for a hundred years.

And he said, "We have had enough."

And Shain said, "Have him killed."

And Larrent and Masec said, "Have him killed."

Death was close. The last ship had crashed near the wall of the empty blue city. The burns on his left side were deep enough to hold his doubled fist, and each time the wave of weakness lasted a bit longer. He wanted to take one more, or two, or three or even a dozen with him. Another fragment to add to the legend, to be said in an awed whisper, "And when they finally trapped him alone, on Zeran, he . . ."

Andro coughed and it was a cat-weak sound in the eternal dusk. Deralan, Chief of Empire Police, had personally headed this final, successful chase. And Andro knew that wiry, dour Deralan was a cautious man. Andro had felt the streets shudder as the ships had landed in a circle



around the blue city. The ring of Deralan's men would be advancing toward the heart of the city, searching each building with care, the ring growing closed, tighter as they neared the center.

When he breathed there was a bubbling in the deepest part of the highest wound on his left side. His legs started to bend. He braced them once more, lifted his heavy head in time to see a flicker of movement at the end of the alley. All weakness was forgotten as he raised the weapon a trifle.

There was hard amusement in him as he thought how the pursuers must feel. Each one of the previous five escapes had bordered on the miraculous. Now they would be expecting a further miracle.

"No miracles this time," he said, and knew that the borderline of delirium had caused him to speak aloud.

A shadow appeared at the end of the alley. He lifted the weapon, sighted carefully. The firmness on which his feet were braced opened with an oiled abruptness. It wrenched his wounds so that he screamed out in agony. As he fell he saw the vast rim of the orange star directly overhead before the opening clapped shut far above him and he fell through an emptiness that was blacker than deep space.

**S**ARRZ, Deputy Director of the Bureau of Sociometrics, was a round little man with squirrel-bright eyes and a face like a plaster death mask. It was situations exactly like this which made him realize

that his EC—Emotional Conditioning—was getting a bit frayed around the edges. He could not prevent a thalamic reaction to such . . . stupidity. There was really no other word for it.

He turned in his chair so that he would not have to look at the two of them, so that he could regain some of his control. Framed in the window, thirty yards across and fifteen yards high, was most of the City of Transition. It looked, Sarrz sometimes thought, like several thousand bridal cakes with raspberry frosting. Beyond the ten thousand foot towers which marked the four corners of the city was darkness.

In the name of energy conservation Transition was now resting on a .8 gravity planet in Era Middle 6 in a high index probability. Transition was imitating a mountain, hence the opacity beyond the slip towers.

Sarrz realized that his pride in the Field Teams was possibly a bit unreasonable. He spoke without turning toward the two members of the team.

"The quality of your indoctrination is questionable," he said softly. "I shall conduct this on a primer basis. What is Transition?"

He knew by the voice that the younger of the two, the female, had spoken. She was the atavistic type—a throwback to a higher index of sensuality and emotional sway. A mistake to have ever let her go out.

"Transition," Calna said, "is an opera-

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tional station in probability space-time. There are three such stations. This one operates on the socionetic level through the medium of Field Teams." She used the exact words of the basic manual.

"Excellent," he said with a trace of irony. "Please continue, Agent."

Her voice faltered a bit. "There are twenty-six known galactic civilizations with a high probability index, and many thousand more . . . distant."

He turned and stared at her. With her sturdy figure and overlong hair she looked like one of the old prints. "Is that the right word?"

"Not distant. Less available," she corrected.

Sarrz leaned back in his chair. "Much better. Continue, please."

The male agent was obviously uncomfortable. He kept fingering the tunic insignia. Calna said, rapidly, "With the discovery and application of the Oxton Effect, it became apparent that there was no need to limit any galactic civilization to the space-time rigidity previously known. With easy slip between the twenty-six civilizations with high probability index, it was believed that a unification on twenty-six space-time levels could be accomplished. Research had shown that only three space-time levels could be unified immediately. This was done. The unified civilization of three space-time aspects set itself the task of bringing the social level of the remaining twenty-three up to the point where unification could be undertaken."

"And how could this be done?" Sarrz asked in silky tone.

The girl flushed. "Field Teams, trained in Socionetics, and based at Transition, were assigned to the twenty-three lagging cultures. It was discovered that if the Field Teams acted openly, as agents from a parallel space-time, their efforts caused a deviation in probability of the culture development so that the civilization resulting became less probable, and hence could not

be kept within slip range. It could still be reached, of course, as can the several thousand less probable ones, but only with exorbitant power expenditure."

"I see," said Sarrz, as though he were hearing of it for the first time. He leaned forward a bit. "And have we ever lost one of these parallel space-time cultures through too obvious meddling?"

"Once," the girl said, "Several years ago. It was number seventeen on the program chart."

Sarrz was ready for the kill. He leaned forward a fraction of an inch more. "How can you be certain that it isn't two that we have lost, Agent? How can you be certain that your violation of all standing instructions hasn't lost us number four as well?"

The girl flushed and then turned pale. "You sit here in Transition and lose touch with the Field Team problems," she said boldly. "Solin and I have been on the case for over five years. As soon as we were well enough educated in language and customs to walk among them as subjects of the Empire, we found out that our hope was Andro, youngest son of the ruler. You do not know, Deputy Director, how hard we tried to get close enough to Andro to control him, control his rashness, so as to improve his timing. He led the revolt against Empire when his followers were too few, his resources too slim. Five times we managed to save him. I could not stand by and see him killed in an alley. I could not face beginning again. And let me absolve Solin here, my teammate, from any responsibility. He made the strongest protest possible. I went ahead on my own authority. And I do not think we have forced number four out of range. into a low probability index."

Sarrz closed his eyes for long seconds, opened them suddenly and stared at the girl. "You were trained, Agent. You were told the danger of obvious meddling. You were told how long these things can continue.

You knew that it may be two thousand years before we can steer that culture to the point where acceptance and unification can be considered. Knowing all these things about you, Agent, you leave me with but one conclusion. That you became personally and emotionally so involved with this Andro savage that you lost your head and tried, very sentimentally, to save him. Is that not true?" She turned her eyes from him. "Answer me!" he said softly.

"I... I don't know. Possibly it is true."

"Agent, there are seven hundred teams operating in that parallel culture. Most of them are attempting to activate a technicist renaissance. Others are directing the subjects of that Empire in equally necessary paths. Other teams, such as the one you two form, have been operating on the socio-political level. Up until now there has not been one violation of security."

Sarrz stood up and walked to the window. He whirled "Think of it once! Think of what you've done! One tiny little push and a galaxy of two billions of habitable planets is pushed forever out of our reach! What did you do with him?"

Solin said in a low tone, "We cut the passage and as he fell, we resealed it. He was unconscious by the time we floated him down to the chamber. He was badly hurt. Calna stayed with him and I set up the field, returned to our ship and activated the field, removing both of them from the city. He was almost gone. We rebuilt the tissues, took him in deep sleep to the dark side of that planet, to one of the dead cities which they have lost the skill to visit, and placed him on the zero metabolic level. Then we... grew worried and came back."

"So you grew worried, did you?" Sarrz said with acid sweetness. "What am I to tell the Director?"

"If only they hadn't spotted him as he escaped from the ship." Solin said.

"I've been going over your detailed reports," Sarrz said, with a sudden note of hope in his voice. "This Deralan, he who

headed the pursuit, isn't he a very ambitious one?"

"Very," Solin said.

"Then there's our chance! This sixth escape by Andro will ruin Deralan. Shain will probably have him shot. Shain will want proof of Andro's death. Is there any distinctive mark on this Andro?"

"A tattoo of the royal House of Calvan on the upper portion of the right arm."

"Go into slip at once, Solin. Take a square of the skin with the tattoo on it. Use your finder to contact the Field Team on Rael. Give the little trophy to either Agent of the team. It will be placed in Deralan's hand before he has his audience with Shain. I don't think Deralan will ask any questions."

"But then," said Calna, in a thin voice, "when Andro reappears..."

"He won't reappear. He'll sleep there for ten thousand years, if it seems necessary."

The girl stood up, one hand at her throat. "You can't do that!"

"You have no hand in any more discussion of either policy or procedure, girl. You are no longer an Agent. You will receive all the usual pensions. Report to field five at once. They'll have orders on you. You are being sent back to our own space-time. Any planet preference?"

"Earth," the girl said softly.

For a moment Sarrz forgot his irritation with her. "Indeed! I guess I never noticed origin on your card. Do you know, this is the first time I have ever actually met anyone from our planet of origin."

She lifted her chin, with a look of pride. "It is a good place," she said. "It is a good place to know, and a good place to go back to."

"I am sorry," Sarrz said with gentleness. "Possibly you were never right for this sort of work. I am truly sorry."

"Why can not Andro be released to recruit new personnel for his revolt?" she asked. "Wouldn't it save time?"

The irritation came back into Saarz' voice. "Release him and he knows that he did not escape through his own powers. He knows he was helped, and to him it would be help through the good offices of the supernatural. He would at once relate this last escape to the previous five, and become, through his new convictions, a son of the gods rather than a revolutionary. Rebellion would change from a social to a quasi-religious basis, and we know that in order to keep number four within the high probability index range, we must hasten development along the *same* lines as would normally occur. We have plotted their culture curve. We can accelerate it without affecting probability, but we cannot redraw the curve on a new basis without losing them forever, or at least until slip becomes possible for lesser probabilities, and our technicians in symbolics say that will never occur."

"So," Calna said in a dead tone, "you will leave him there. A living death."

"There is no room for sentimentality in our work," Saarz said.

Calna turned and left the Deputy Director's headquarters. The door orifice folded softly shut behind her.

**E**ARTH was always the origin. Symbolics made that clear. Ten thousand times ten thousand, Earth was the planet of origin. In the beginnings of the science of Symbolic Probability, it was thought all deviations were of equal value. The result would be, if it could be visualized at all, in the shape of a fan, with an infinity of lines diverging from a fixed point, lines equally spaced.

This concept did not take into account the limitations on culture deviation. Always it was humankind, and reactions—social reactions—are limited, so it became a problem or dividing infinity by the finite. The result is infinity also, but the lines were no longer equally spaced from the common point. They were bundled.

Each space-time frame was thus co-existent with its sister probabilities. And as long as they were bundled, grouped, you could slip from one sister probability into the next.

The space-time frame in which the contention originated had tried to jump extragalactic space and had been hurled back. It was a rigid boundary to further expansion, until, of course, it was found that there were twenty-six superimposed home galaxies in the probability grouping. The small golden pyramidal ships quivered, shimmered, became milky and disappeared in one frame to reappear in the next. So mated were three of the probability frames that the languages, the mores, even the fads and fashions were co-existent. Had it not been possible to slip to one of the other two, the slip would have been accomplished in the other direction within a matter of months rather than years. Three were ready for unification. Twenty-three needed acceleration in their own charted culture line. One was lost. One day it would be twenty-five times two billion planets. Symbolic Probability indicated that there were other bundles of space-time frames in which complete unity and cross-travel had been achieved, but their probabilities were so divergent, and on so low an index that slip could not be accomplished.

Slip was the only word that would fit the mode of travel. Travel in a dimension for which there was no name. A dimension folded upon itself, so that the little golden ships were neither up nor down nor sideways. They neither shrank nor expanded. They "slipped" across a probability matrix into a sister reality without positional change. So close were the co-existences that it explained everything that had ever gone bump in the night, shadows half-seen out of the corner of the eye. You left your own frame and entered the sister frame which had been brushing at the sensory tendrils through generations of superstitution. And the frame you left behind

was the frame which, through its very closeness, had appeared to rap on tables and speak through trumpets.

Calna stepped from the express strip onto a local strip and then across the increasingly slower strips to the platform of field five. The planet on which Transition rested, was in Era 6, a frame not ready for unification. She had been assigned to Era 4. Eras one, two and three were the unified ones, and, with her loss of Agent standing, the only ones available to her. Possibly, in her lifetime, another would be unified. Era twenty, she had heard, was almost ready. Transition rested in Era 6, next to space stations constructed in Eras one, two and three.

She turned and looked back across the city she would never see again. To the great mass of peoples in Eras one, two, and three, the three great cities constructed to slip across probability lines were more rumor than actuality. Only trained minds could comprehend the enormity of the task the three unified cultures had set themselves. Only highly specialized people could aid in the task.

To the average man and woman of the three basic eras, it was merely a new and wondrous and inexplicable advantage to be able to enjoy three contiguous environments. Those with ample means arranged title to the same piece of property co-existent on three probability levels. The slip field was installed in a central doorway with

minimal controls. Each room was three rooms. For the very wealthy, proper positioning of the co-existent homes could result in three climates to be enjoyed. The ideal was a tropic warmth in one, eternal springtime in the next, and a crisp and endless October in the third.

She turned her back on Transition. There was a thickness in her throat. She knew that she should feel shame at the enormity of her mistake—and yet she could not. She knew that her identification with Andro had been too intense, and yet she did not wish it any other way.

"Ex-Agent to Era One," she said crisply to the routing clerk. He eyed her curiously. Ex-Agents were rare. Dead Agents were not so rare. Resignation was unheard of. And so the routing clerk knew that the change of status had been disciplinary.

The customary respect shown to Agents was markedly lacking. He stared at her until she flushed. "Why the delay?" she asked angrily.

He winked. "Are your pensions going to be big enough for two of us?" he asked, leering.

"I can still put you on report," she said.

"But you won't." He yawned. "Take the one at the end of the platform."

She walked out and down the platform. She saw it and felt lost. It was one of the rooted ships, built only for the slip between frames. Unlike the Agent ships, it could not leap like a golden arrow from

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planet to planet within any frame. It would contain no survival equipment. The minimal controls would be no more complex than the buttons in an elevator.

Once she was in that stodgy ship there would be no turning back. She slowed her pace as she neared it. The ship beyond was a true Agent's ship, with its double control panel, one for probability change, one for positional change. She could see the new seal beside the insignia and knew that this ship had just been completely checked and re-equipped.

She turned and glanced back. The routing clerk had his back to her. She moved quickly then. It had to be done in seconds. She darted into the Agent's ship. In her mind was the great stabbing pain that came with disobedience. It was the same pain she had felt when overruling Solin and rescuing Andro. Conditioning caused that pain, and should have made disobedience impossible. But, as in the rescue of Andro, there was something in her that fought the pain, made it endurable.

She knew that to slip to Era 4 would mean capture within seconds. She picked Era 18 at random. As she hit the lever with the base of her palm, she heard the suck-snap of the port behind her. As the ship began to fade around her she heard the clangor of the alarm. In thirty seconds they could track her. As the ship shimmered back into life in Era 18, she dropped her hands to the lower panel and shot it straight up at maximum takeoff. As the planet dwindled in the screen, she chopped the ship over onto SL drive, counted slowly to ten, swung it out of SL twenty light-years from the planet, slipped over into Era 22, picked a random course change, put it back into SL for a twenty count. After nine Era shifts in which she kept away from the basic eras and from Era 4, she knew that pursuit was out of the question.

The strain of escape had kept her from thinking of the consequences of her act. Now that she was safe for a time, she felt

slack, exhausted. She wept for the first time since she was a child. When there were no more tears, she slept.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Calna

SARRZ stood at attention facing the Director. The words that had lashed out at him made her feel faint and dizzy. There was contempt on the Director's gaunt face.

Sarrz tried again. He said, "But no Agent has disobeyed a—"

"Be still! What order had you started to give when I put you under arrest?"

"I had ordered Agent Solin to go to Era 4 and destroy the body of Andro. I thought she would immediately try to . . . you see, there's an emotional attachment . . . seemed logical that. . ."

"Do you remember your history, Sarrz? What, in its simplest sense, was cancer?"

"Why . . . uncontrolled cell growth, starting with one rebel cell and—"

"Any Agent, Sarrz, equipped with an Agent's ship, is very, very close to being impregnable. We are dealing with an unbalanced Agent, for the first time in sociogenetic history. You would have fixed it so that she would have returned to that place and found this Andro destroyed. Revenge is a typical emotion in an unbalanced mind. What, then, would keep her from using the ship and her mobility to intrude in the most destructive possible way on all probability frames within our reach?"

Sarrz blanched. "But. . ."

"One rebel cell in our structure, Sarrz. Remember that. If we are not to lose twenty-two sister galaxies, we must eliminate her. Possibly you think this is an alarmist reaction. Agent Calna ceased to be predictable when she prejudiced the entire operation in Era four. Angered and hurt she can force twenty-two cultures off their extrapolated pattern. Saying that she retains

enough loyalty to refrain from doing that is mere wishful thinking. I want every available Field Team briefed and assigned to the planet Era four calls Zeran. I want a trap that she won't see on the way in, and can't slip out of. Is that clear?"

"It is clear," Sarraz said with an effort.

"In the meantime proceed with your plan of presenting Shain, through Solin and the team on Rael, with proof of the death of his youngest son. But warn Solin not to kill Andro. Not under any circumstances. Once we have the girl, Andro can be safely killed."

WHEN Deralan had been young, he had not feared space flight. He stood as a guest on the bridge of the flagship of the police fleet returning to Rael. He was returning to report to Shain the utter destruction of the remnants of Andro's rebel force. And the sixth escape of Andro himself.

Deralan was a realist. The execution would be swift, and relatively painless. For a time he had considered lying to Shain. But lying led straight to the rooms of evil repute under the main palace, and there Deralan would scream until Shain found the truth and permitted him to die.

In his youth he had accepted the great, roaring, shuddering, thundering ships as a part of life that would never change. Now he knew of the great fields where tens of thousands of the ships moldered away, as no one had the skill to repair them. If the drive failed in flight, the crew and passengers were dead. It was that simple.

And many had failed. Abilities had been lost, somehow. He could see the sign of those lost abilities in the puffy face of the captain of the flag ship now standing before the vast control board, watching his officers complete the intricate procedure for landing. Deralan felt a vast bitterness. They were like monkeys firing a gun. The monkey pulled the trigger and the gun went bang. Ask the monkey to explain the principle of expansion of gasses. The officers

pulled switches in the order prescribed in the space flight manuals. The ship landed. It was that simple. If one switch was pulled and somewhere in the guts of the ship a coil failed, that was too bad, and very very fatal.

Routine repairs could be made. New tubes, oxygenation equipment—things on that level. But what made the ship take off, accelerate to ten lights, deaccelerate and land—what induced the normal gravity under any acceleration—what force adapted the view screens to the acceleration—all those things were mysteries, lost in the ancient past when men were wiser, stronger.

Deralan thought sourly that Andro had not been very farsighted. All he had to do was wait. He could die knowing that within a thousand years there would be no more ships that would function. With no more ships, the House of Galvan would rule one planet rather than a galaxy. Each inhabited planet would be isolated, left to go its own way, find its own answers, maybe win its way back to space. The ships would die and Empire would die with them.

Now the face of Rael was so close that it filled all of the view screen, the tiny drift of cloud appearing flat against the surface. Deralan's mind kept returning to the report the three men had given him. He could not suppress a thin eerie feeling of awe and concern. "I saw him. He seemed to be hurt. He had a weapon. As I aimed, he dropped out of sight. We went back there. There was no place for him to get out. There was no hole for him to drop through. He was just . . . gone."

Shain would not be amused by that story. Three of them had seen it. Deralan had isolated the three who had seen it happen. After considering all sides of the question he had killed them. His power over his men was that of life and death, with no questions asked. Their eye-witness account was an embarrassing factor, an unnecessary factor in the equation. Deralan

felt no regret, and no satisfaction over it.

He knew that he did not dare lie to Shain, and yet he wished to continue to live. It was impasse.

The fleet landed, a far smaller fleet than had set out in pursuit of Andro. A guard of honor awaited Deralan as he disembarked. They formed a hollow square around him. Deralan smiled. Shain hadn't been thinking of honor when he sent the guard. Shain had been thinking of escape.

Metal-clad heels struck the paving in harsh cadence as the twelve guards escorted Deralan down the center of the Avenue of Kings. The once-proud street had become a place of bazaars. Rael was a wise and sour old planet. To it had come the dregs of a thousand planets, the sycophants, the cheats, with their smell of depravity, their swaggering insolence. One did not walk alone at night on Rael.

The aimless crowds opened to let the guard through. Some of them jeered at the guards and then fell suddenly silent as they recognized Deralan, feared almost as much as Shain himself and his elder sons.

A drunk reeled too close to the guard. The man at the front left corner of the hollow square reversed his ceremonial short-sword with a practised gesture and smashed the man's skull with the heavy grip.

They marched through the stink of the bazaars, past the crones that vended remedies for every ill, past the street girls in their rags, past men who turned with jerky quickness to hide a wanted face from the keen eye of Deralan. The main palace towered at the end of the Avenue of Kings. They marched through three gates so huge that the men did not have to change formation. Only the fourth gate was so narrow that they shifted to a column of twos. Deralan was midway along the column.

Just as he passed through the gate a screaming girl came racing from the side, her eyes wide with panic. A bearded man chased her. In her fright she ran directly

into Deralan, staggering him. The guards cursed and shoved her roughly back into the grasp of the bearded man. Deralan fingered the object the girl had thrust into his hand. It had a soft texture. In the great main hall of the palace he risked a glance at it. For a moment he did not know what it was. When he at last understood what it was, his mind reeled with the shock, and his mouth went dry.

But Deralan was a realist and an opportunist. They took him back through the corridors to the private apartments of Shain. Shain was a ruin of what had been an enormous, powerful man. Years of debauch had left him looking like a pig carved of cold lard.

"Your report told me nothing," Shain said.

Deralan straightened up from the ceremonial bow. "Forgive me," he said. "I possibly took a childish pleasure in anticipating this moment."

"I have some childish pleasures waiting, if I don't like your report."

Deralan bowed again, advanced and handed the object to Shain. "My proof, your imperial majesty."

Shain unfolded the soft square. He stared at it. Then he threw back his great head and began to laugh. He laughed until tears squeezed out of the small eyes and rolled down the white heavy cheeks. Deralan took a deep breath. He knew that he was out of danger.

"How did you do it?" Shain demanded.

"We searched the city. I found him myself, and killed him. It was your wish."

"You did well. Tonight we shall celebrate your victory . . . and . . . and the death of the best of my three sons, the death of the only one fit to be Emperor."

**A**LWAYS, in a limited world, the machines grew more powerful. Machines were a form of inbreeding. Man turned his attentions onto his own pleasures and comforts and the ma-

chines grew, giving sage electronic attention to the complexities of equations with a thousand variables. And man grew softer within his limitations.

But now, with multiple realities waiting to be merged, the machines were of little help. Properly guided, the machines had indicated the possibility of multiple space-time frames, had assisted in finding a way to reach them. But once reached, it was once again up to man to work with hands and eyes and heart to achieve that unity which would weld twenty-five conditional realities into one world.

The Agents were recruited from those who, in less pressing times, would be termed malcontents, would be difficult to control, manage. All of them were, in one sense atavistic.

The Agent was man. His tools were provided by the machines. And no tools in history equaled the golden pyramidal agent ships. They were the extension of the Agent, the way the stone ax fitted the horny palm of the Neanderthal. On SL drive they could span the galaxy in a mouth. The webbed forces, interlocked and convoluted like the surface of a brain, shimmered constantly along the five planes of the ships. They were very close to being invulnerable. They could dive into a planet crust, protecting the Agent in much the way an insect would be protected while held in the palm of an iron fist as the fist was driven into loam. They could move in any direction except time, and at speeds beyond contractive effects. Yet it was the Man and not the Ship.

Calna entered Era 4 at the galactic rim. She was lost. It took long hours of feeding data into the computers to arrive at exact position. Since exact position was only exact in relation to any known object, she calculated her speed in relation to Zeran's sun in the invisible distance. She established course corrections. The ship flickered once and was gone. Twenty hours later the alarm brought her out of deep sleep a

hundred million miles from Zeran. She had set the protective web so that light was bent around the tiny ship. She risked observation, in three-second intervals, returning to objective invisibility each time. She knew that she could be detected only by a chance intersection of her path from the galactic rim. It was a risk she had to take.

She stretched the weakness of sleep from her body and tried to think clearly. She was afraid. She suspected weakness in herself that implied an eventual failure. The rescue of Andro was, in Sarrz' terms, weakness. Emotionality. In all probability it would make her reactions predictable. And so she had to fight for a cold objectivity. What made it most difficult was that thoughts of Andro made her heart pound and her face flush. Agents were taught to consider the peoples of backward frames as pawns to be moved at will, sacrificed for the sake of socionetic gambits. But she thought of Andro in the way of a woman rather than an agent. Yet, even if she were to rescue Andro and take him out of reach of the Field Teams who were undoubtedly waiting, what would he think of her? What would he see in this strong-bodied woman of a more mature culture? This woman with the grey-bright eyes and the hair like ripened grain in a September sun.

She remembered the harsh and shameful joy with which she had seen the death of the woman, Daylya whose beauty had been like a warm cry in the night.

Andro was, above all else, a strong proud man. He would not react kindly to being aided by a woman who, in all except brute muscle, equaled or surpassed his own strength.

The possibility that they had already killed him was like the first rasp of the knifeblade against her throat. She knew how she would plan it were she in charge of those attempting to intercept her. She would make the path to Andro's black and quiet tomb very simple. And escape impos-

sible. By a focus of power five other Agent ships could hold her ship in stasis. She sensed that they were waiting.

She knew the exact location of 'Andro's body. It was in a crypt in the small room of the highest tower in a frozen city abandoned for half of time. The body would be hard and tough as granite. If there were some way to snatch it up on the run. . . .

Anything could be transferred from planet to ship providing the proper field were built around the item to be transferred. A field was created by a tiny generator no larger than a plum. It could be set to create a field a foot across, or five miles across. But it had to be placed in position.

The item could be received inside the ship, or received within any given range of the ship. She made her plan. It was dependent on deceiving them through apparently descending to land near the crypt. Their reaction times would be trigger-fast. It would be close, and with no possibility of fumbling.

She boldly dropped the ship's screens and streaked toward the dark side of Zeran. She came down through the blackness with her view screens adjusted so that the ruined city stood out as though bathed in a great light. The adjusted generator lay in the small disposal port. The port switch was hooked in with the computer which in turn was hooked up with the aiming screen. She waited without breathing, her hands on the lower panel, fingertips moist on the controls. The interval of drop was to be twenty seconds. The instant she heard the click, she chopped the ship into SL drive and winked away into space. She felt for a fractional part of a second the drag of the focused power of the other Agent ships. It was as though, for that moment, her ship flew through molten lead. For the moment there was nothing for her to do. She had set the ship to come out of SL at exactly twenty seconds, from the moment of the drop. The port was ready and skin-gravity set to hold any air that

would escape, heat screen ready to combat the cold of space.

She put her hand on the main port control. The moment she felt the tiny, twisting dislocation that meant the end of SL, she tripped the control and the port yawned. The receiving area was set outside the open port. With the suddenness of an explosion the entire top of the tower appeared in the receiving area, swung over and thudded against the ship. Using the top panel she slipped ship and tower into Era 20 to give her a few more moments of grace.

The rough stone of the tower was flat against the open port. Using the hand blower she crumbled a hole through the stone, exposing one corner of the black crypt. She widened the hole, caught the crypt with the focused beam of the attractor, angled it through the port—ignoring the crumbled stone that had drifted in, she shut the port and tried to flee.

THE ship did not move. She cried out, and fought the controls. Her hands flashed across the panels as she tried combinations of controls. Higher and higher rose the thin whine of the ship's screens, fighting the holding force. She applied all power to a straight SL drive, feeling the heat rising within the ship. The ship grew hotter and she waited, her jaw set, until she could scent the acrid odor of the scorched tendrils of her hair. Then, with one fast motion, she cut off everything in the ship. The pursuers were in the position of a man who runs to break down a door when the door opens just before his shoulder touches it. Calna's ship gave a tiny lurch and she was ready to take advantage of it. She slipped to Era 1, and immediately to Era 25, and applied full SL drive the moment the new frame had been attained.

The ship whipped off into freedom, and she laughed aloud with a note of hysteria. She used a completely random pattern of slip and direction, taking no chances, working for long hours on the twin panels until



she knew that pursuit was impossible. She knew the danger of awakening Andro in too-unfamiliar an environment. The chance of madness was too great.

In Era 11, one of the most backward ones, she found the planet she wanted. In more sophisticated probability frames, it had been turned into a rest planet for Agents. It was uninhabited in all frames except the basic three. The best aspect of it was that it was not the last place they'd look for her. Anticipating her reaction, they would look at once in the last place. It was neither the best nor the worst, thus a median chance in several billion.

She drifted low across the springtime face of the planet and selected a place where a crystal stream came down across rocks to form a pool beside a slant of lush green grass. She tucked the ship between the mighty roots of a fairyland tree so tall that clouds brushed its crown. This was a planet on which one felt elfin. Small and wild and free. The vastness of the trees and the boulders and the utter stillness were the artifacts of magic.

She opened the purloined crypt and laid her fingers against the marble coldness of Andro's cheek. All body functions were suspended. She moved quickly and lightly as she prepared the twin injections that would bring him slowly up to the threshold of life once again. The tips of the needles had to be heated before she could put them into the vein on his inner arm.

She made the injections and then laid her head against his broad chest. It was like listening to a stone. It was the coldness of death and she felt small and afraid. With no circulation of the blood, with the blood itself as still and hard as the red veins in marble, it took a long time for the effect to spread from the point of inoculation.

The heart, at last, gave a slow thud. She counted to thirty before she heard the next thud. Each time the interval decreased by a full second. Body warmth began to return. When he took his first fluttering, shallow breath, she straightened up and smiled down at him. There was color in his face again.

With the help of the small attractor she unhooked from her belt, she lifted him effortlessly and carried him through the port and placed him on the fresh-scented grass at the edge of the deep blue pool.

Then, motivated by a force that was strange to her, she used the cleansing chamber of the ship, webbed fresh garments for herself in a brighter color than ever before.

## CHAPTER THREE

Revolt on Simpar!

THE slip towers glowed, grew misty and indistinct. The City of Transition gave a delicate shrug of raspberry shoulders and slipped from Era 6 to Era 4. The risk of thus hastening the de-



## HOW SLOAN'S LINIMENT AID MUSCULAR PAINS

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viation from plotted culture line was great. But the Director felt that coordination could better be obtained within the target era than from outside. As yet no method of direct communication between eras had been devised. Field Team reports could be received at Transition and orders could go out only if the city were in the era which ex-Agent Calna had made so critical.

Sarrz felt lost. The Director had stepped in to handle direct coordination of Field Teams. Sarrz was left without a function. Though it irked him, it did give him a chance to review the entire picture. As with all directing heads in Socionetics, Sarrz had a good background in Symbolic Probability. With the idle and aimless feeling of mental doodling, he decided to equate the index of probability of the loss of further space-time frames.

He took the small table which held the computer and swung it around within easy reach. He put it on alphabetic scale and ignored, as he fed in the data, the glow of the 'insufficient data' light. He had the direct loss of one era, the pending loss of a second, plus areas of disturbance in three more.

He read off the index and it startled him. He cleared the computer and tried again. Same result. He sat and listened to the quickening thud of his heart. The index of probability of all sister space-time frames being lost was almost grotesquely high, so high that complete data would have to be within itself improbable in order to level off the result based on incomplete data.

The inference was that some outside factor was at work, some unequated factor. There was a parallel in astronomy. Find the deviation and then look for the cause.

Suddenly Sarrz realized that this matter was of highest importance. The Director must be informed, and at once.

He reached for the switch that would enable him to communicate with the Director.

And that was the way they found him.

His heart had stopped as his fingertips had touched the switch.

ANIMAL caution did not desert Andro as he recovered consciousness. He neither stirred nor opened his eyes. He remained quite still and concentrated on bringing all senses up to peak awareness. Hearing—the soft rush and babble of water, a crackling stir, as of wind in leaves. Scent—the spiced smell of brush and forest and wild places. Touch—brush of grass against his arm. Warm air against his body. He remembered the deepness of the burn wounds. He concentrated his sensory attention on the wounded areas and could find no message of pain from the scorched nerve ends. He increased the depth of his respiration and could not detect the quick knives that had stabbed him with each breath as he stood in the blue shadows of the alley.

He remembered those who had joined him, and who had lost. Grief was deep and slow and still. Daylya and all the others. His fault. And born of impatience. Had he waited, grown a bit stronger, planned more thoroughly. . . .

His ear picked up the whisk of grass against an approaching foot. Fingertips touched his chest over his heart. He opened his eyes just enough to see the figure outlined against the sky, bending over him. The equation was simple. Once all your allies are dead, all who remain are enemies.

Andro struck with clenched fist, with a roll that brought the heavy muscles of shoulder and back into the blow. He rolled onto hands and knees and jumped up onto his feet, weaving a little from weakness. He stood under a strange sky near the mightiest tree he had ever seen and looked down on the crumpled unconscious figure of a woman. She wore a toga-like garment of lime yellow, a wide belt from which small unknown devices dangled. Her hair had the clarity and purity of the white fall of water into the deep blue pool a few yards away. On the angle of her jaw was the

spreading stain of the force of the blow. He stood and waited and listened for others. There was no sound but the water and the wind. He bent over and fingered her jaw clumsily. The bone did not feel loose and broken under his fingers.

It was then that he remembered his wounds. He looked at his side, and found a strange thing. The skin was clear, firm, healthy over the wounds, and he would have thought he had dreamed the wounds were it not for the untanned pallor of the new skin.

He looked at the woman again, and he frowned. The alley floor had given way under him and he had fallen into darkness. The woman was connected with that phenomenon in some way. At the moment she was helpless. Yet the devices on the belt she wore were a promise that she might not remain helpless. He rolled her over and looked for a place to unhook the belt. It seemed to have no fastening and it fitted too tightly around her slim waist to be slipped down over her hips. He contented himself with unhooking the small devices. He could not guess their uses. Yet they had a gleam that spoke of efficiency, utility. There were six of them. He carried them carefully in his cupped hands and placed them behind a stone. It taxed his strength to tear a strip from the hem of the lime yellow toga. With the strip he bound her hands tightly behind her, placing the knot out of the reach of her fingers. As he tightened the knot, his right arm extended, he saw that the tattoo was gone from his upper arm. It was replaced with another area of that pallid healthy skin.

Andro sat a few feet from the woman and waited for her to regain consciousness. He tried to guess what had happened. He still wore the leather and metal battle skirt, but his cape was gone. He remembered tearing it off as it had started to flame, throwing it aside as he picked up the dying girl and carried her through the great smashed place in the hull of his ship. The

battle skirt showed signs of having been scorched. The thongs that bound his sandals were blackened, crisped and the hair had been burned from his calves and ankles. The holster at his right side was empty.

The woman's face was toward him as she opened her eyes. Her eyes were a clear grey and they saw nothing. They focused on him and he did not like the look of intelligence that came into them. In face and body he found her pleasing, but the eyes alarmed him. They spoke too clearly of knowledge beyond his own—knowledge that made him feel like a child. He saw her test the strength of the strip that bound her wrists, then sit up awkwardly, throw her head back to swing a heavy strand of her hair away from her face. She smiled at him as a conspirator would smile.

"Who are you?" he asked heavily.

She moved her underjaw from side to side and grimaced. "You are strong, Andro."

"Who are you?"

"Your friend. Your very good friend. My name is Calna."

"Calna," he said, tasting the word carefully. "I was dying. Now I am whole again. I was trapped, and now I am free. If you did that, it is evidence that you are a friend. But your purposes in doing that may make you enemy rather than friend."

She glanced down at her belt. "Untie me, Andro. The bonds are too tight."

He untied her. She stood up, flexing her hands, rubbing her wrists. The top of her shining head was on a level with his eyes. She smiled at him and there was something in the smile he didn't like.

She said, "I'm helpless now because you took the things from my belt?"

"Of course."

She put her hands on him and he tried to strike her again. He cried out in sudden agony as her fingers found pressure points. She did not cease smiling. She touched his elbows in what could have almost been a caress and both arms hung slack and use-

less. Her hand swept across the side of his throat and he fell heavily. He tried to move and though his effort made the sweat stream from his face, he could not move.

She sat beside him and said softly, "It will go away in a few moments, Andro. And do not let your pride be hurt. Those are methods in which I was, carefully trained." She stood up and glanced around. She went unerringly to the stone behind which he had hid the shining things. She picked them up and hooked them casually onto the belt.

Some of the weakness had left him. He sat up and glared at her. She laughed. "Don't look so fierce, Andro. You see, I know you very well. I've known you for four long years. There were five escapes before this last one. Probably you thought they were good luck, or even good judgment. I was helping you, Andro. Six times you should have died, and I helped you. The seventh time occurred while you were unconscious and that was the worst time of all, the most dangerous."

"Why did you help me?"

"I am not from your world, Andro."

"I have guessed that."

"My world was interested in your revolt against Shain. It was to our advantage to help you succeed. We helped in many ways, but not enough. I was following orders given to me. When it was seen that our help was not enough, I was ordered to let you die on Zeran. I disobeyed orders."

"Why?"

Calna frowned. "I . . . I don't really know. I knew that I was becoming emotionally interested in you, but that in itself should not have been strong enough to enable me to act counter to my training. It just became something I . . . I had to do, Andro. Now I am being hunted by my world."

"As I am being hunted by mine?"

"No. Your world believes you are dead."

He stood up as the last increment of his strength flooded back. He looked around.

"Is this your world or mine?"

"Neither."

He stared at her. "What are we to do? How did we come here? I wish to go back to my own world. I left . . . many things unfinished."

"You cannot go back. There is no way."

Andro watched her for a moment. "Until that moment, I believe you told the truth. Now why do you start to lie?"

"Listen carefully and understand, if you can. I will say it as simply as I possibly can, Andro. We tried to help your world without making our presence known. If we did it too obviously, your world would grow out of our reach and we could no longer visit it. If you should go back now, the mere fact of your returning from the dead will put your world out of our reach. So I cannot permit that."

He studied her. "That seems odd, Calna. You say you are being hunted by your world. Can they hunt for you here?"

"Of course."

"Then why not return me to my world. You say it will place my world out of reach. Then wouldn't that mean safety for you, in my world?"

"Yes, but it is against all my training, all I believe in, and . . ."

He saw her indecision and for the first time he felt that his strength equaled hers. He put his hands lightly on her shoulders, felt her tense under his touch. He looked into her grey eyes until her glance wavered, dropped. She came into his arms with a small cry in her throat that was like a confession of weakness, that was the sign of the transfer to him of the authority for whatever path they would take into the unknown future.

"We will go to my world," he said. He felt her acquiescence. "And before we return," he said, "you will teach me how to use the devices of your world. When I return I shall be stronger than Shain and Larrent and Masec, even with no followers."

She stood a little apart from him then, her head lowered. "My people will be looking for us in your world. They will want to stop us, before the effects of your return have made sufficient change in your world to move it out of their reach."

*At a place which was the essence of no-place, and in a time which, in stasis, was no-time, there was a record of progress in the analysis of paradox, where directed thought maintained the record, where a billion eras moved the record one half-step nearer the point where at last all infinities would become finite. It could not be done on the basis of a controlled experiment, because there is a flaw in that theory. The mere factor of control is an alien factor, a newness added to the other components. Without control, all things must be weighed and all factors considered. The measured counting of high value infinities can only be performed in no-time, and only no-place is vast enough to hold the records.*

*A child awakens and cries in the night. In its simplest sense the impact of that occurrence can be measured through a thousand generations, given all factors for weighing. What complicates it is that cause and effect are expressions of the same factor. It is more delicate to trace the child's awakening backward for a thousand generations, but still finite and feasible—given enough time and enough space for the keeping of records. Where it becomes paradoxical is when worlds are bridged and all probabilities assume equal values, and in ten thousand co-existent fields of probability where the child awoke at the same instant, the same track can be plotted backward for a thousand generations and be identical for ninety-nine hundred and ninety-nine probabilities, only to diverge at the next to the last generation in the very last of the ten thousand co-existent webs in the matrix. So go back and make that last one similar, and the result will be an increment of divergence*

*which results, most probably, in no child at all, and, less probably, in a night of unbroken rest for the child.*

*The labor involved makes it essential that the computations be made in no-time, and the records kept in no-space.*

*And one facet of the endless computation can be—as one range of probabilities begin to gain mutual access, what happens if such access is denied?*

*The finite computation of infinities is possible because infinity is merely a function of time and space. Only nothingness becomes endless.*

EVER since the dreaded audience with Shain that had been so miraculously saved from disaster, Deralan was obscurely troubled. It was his nature and his profession to learn the background of all events and incidents. Long search for the girl who had handed him the object which had bought his safety was fruitless. He was almost glad that he could not find her. They had returned to Rael from Zeran with all haste possible. Either the object had been brought back on the pursuit ships, or it had arrived at Rael by faster means. And Deralan did not see how it was possible for the object to have been smuggled onto one of the ships. As to faster means of transport—there were none.

As he tried to pick up the threads of his responsibilities that had been disrupted by the revolt of Andro, third son of Shain, he found himself suffering from an inability to give his complete attention to his duties. The capital city was very much like a cage of wild animals. The animals detected the faint inattention of the trainer and crouched a bit lower on their haunches, ready to spring.

When two of his most trusted assistants were torn to bits by a mob, Deralan did not feel the old raw fury with which he had avenged similar previous incidents. His identification, capture and execution of the leaders of the mob was quick and effective;



but without heat. His villa, protected almost as well as the very palaces of Shain, no longer was a place of revelry by night. He ceased the entertainment of those close to Shain, and knew that by so doing he was prejudicing his influence at court. He spent more and more time alone, and his thoughts were dark. Many times there was fear in him, but fear of something not quite understood.

He felt that somewhere in the city he would find an answer to all that troubled him. He began to listen more carefully to the talk of odd happenings in the empire. It seemed to be a time of strange occurrences that bordered on the supernatural.

On one sultry afternoon when most of the city slept, Deralan questioned a frightened girl who had been brought to him by his agents. She was a dirty, half-wild creature, seemingly poised on the very edge of flight. Her dark red hair was matted with filth and her tip-slanted eyes were of that distinctive lavender shade of the women of Vereen. Her rags barely covered her body. In her left armpit was the telltale gouge where the mark of the slave had been recently removed. Very recently removed.

Though she was frightened to the very borderline of unconsciousness, she would not speak. And such was her emaciation that it was immediately obvious to Deralan she would die at once if force were used. What intrigued him most was the freshness of the blisters along the calf of her left leg. Those were the distinctive blisters carried by one who has traveled in one of the old ships with their defective shielding.

Several isolated bits of information clicked into place in Deralan's mind and convinced him that this girl held a clue to his own bafflement. The increasing numbers of escaped slaves on Rael—the fresh blisters—the girl's obvious fright—the two month delay in customary reports from slave marts—all these things pointed to Simpar, from his agents on that planet of something only she could give him.

Her teeth were small and even and pointed. "Kill me and watch how a Vereen woman can die!" she whispered to him.

"What made you slave?" he asked, forcing a gentleness into his tone.

"I stabbed my husband. The court sentenced me. They said it was without cause. I was shipped to Simpar with hundreds of others."

"And you escaped. How?"

She moved restlessly in the thongs which bound her, and turned her head from him, affecting casualness, though the cords stood out like wires in her lean throat.

"How would it feel," he asked softly, "to be clean once more. To be scrubbed and cleaned and scented again. To feel the touch of silk. To recline beside a spiced fountain and have rich foods brought to you. Fine fruit from Vereen. Wines from Lell."

She did not move. He saw a tear cut a channel of whiteness through the grime of her cheek.

He called the bored attendants and told them to free her and bring her to his villa. He turned his back on their knowing sneers and left. By the time the girl was brought through the innermost gates of the villa all was ready for her. The maids took her in hand. It was dusk in the wide gardens before she was brought to him. She stood with a new pride, tall and silent and quite lovely.

He watched her eat with the precise, almost vicious hunger of a half-starved animal. The wines were brought. She was wary but after a time she lost wariness and her lips grew swollen and her eyes grew vague and she emptied the glass each time he filled it from the flagon. Night came and he sat with her. She laughed with an empty sound as he caressed her.

"It wasn't hard to escape, was it?" he asked.

"No. Not hard. Not with the gates broken and the guards dead and the ships waiting. Not hard."

"Who broke the gates and killed the guards?"

She giggled. "Oh, but I am not supposed to tell anyone that, yet. Not until he is ready. Not until we receive word."

"You can tell me, Leesha. You will stay here with me in comfort and in peace. There will be no secrets between us. You can tell me." His tone was wheedling.

She giggled empty again. Her eyes shuttered and she slumped out of the circle of his arm. He grasped her shoulders and shook her hard. "Tell me!" he shouted.

Her head wobbled loosely. He let her fall to the edge of the fountain. She lay on her back and her breathing was loud between her parted lips.

At noon the next day, heavily guarded, Deralan shuffled up the ramp and through the port of the waiting ship. His face was deeply pocked and scarred, unrecognizable. Around him was the wailing of the newly enslaved. The inner door clanged shut. In the confined space Deralan's nose wrinkled with distaste. At take off there was no warning. They slid into a tangled heap at one end of the lightless room.

As he fought free of the others, found a clear space on the floor, Deralan wondered what would become of him if he could not prove his true identity on Simpar.

ONCE Calna had committed herself to Andro's plan, she resolutely forgot how far she had veered from the paths of her training. The only remaining indication of the extent of the conflict within her was the splitting headaches which blinded her at times, without warning.

Andro had showed surprising aptness as a pupil. At times she felt that he had taken all of her knowledge and combined it with his own to create a strength beyond anything she had ever before experienced. It was he who had selected Simpar as the symbol of everything he detested about Empire.

They had driven the golden ship deep into the planet crust and waited there for the thrum of directed energy which would tell them that they had been detected. Andro, using the device which collapsed the orbital electrons in matter without releasing the energy, had driven the long slanting corridor to the surface. The ship, completely shielded, lay behind them, deep in the skin of Simpar, utterly undetectable.

Together, disguised by his suggestion as slave buyers from Lell, they had visited the pens, the auction blocks. Though inured through training to the misery on savage planets, Calna felt emotionally staggered by the mere weight of the suffering around her.

Andro, his face altered by her careful surgery, stalked through the open slave marts with an unforgiving grimace in his eyes, in the clamp of his jaw. They knew their danger. Were he to announce his presence too quickly, they would be over-

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powered by Field Teams before his influence could spread enough to cause a probability deviation.

Calna sensed that Simpar, as well as the other main planets of Empire, was under constant, wary scrutiny. She explained to Andro, saying, "We must free them in such a way that it will appear to be a natural revolt. I have been trained in that sort of thing. Yet if I do it too cleverly, my presence here will be suspected."

He thought it over. "Then why not take this step? As we free them, give them ships and send them away to other planets. And, as they leave, tell them that Andro of Galvan has released them, and to keep that information secret until the word is passed. That will give this influence you talk about, the widest possible chance to operate."

THE Director received the report in person. He immediately beamed it to all Field Teams in Era 4, saying, "Slave revolt on Simpar indicates help being given by Ex-Agent Calna. Request immediate Team concentration at Simpar."

Within twenty hours the suspicion was verified by direct report from Simpar. The Field Team reported, "Ex-Agent Calna and Andro can be immediately eliminated. However, escaped slaves have gone to other planets with information re Andro. Request verification of present probability index, as ship power less responsive than before."

"Index sagging. Approaching danger point. Immediate elimination ordered. Verify. Verify."

There was no verification. The Director waited until the last possible moment before ordering the slip back to a stable era. The city slipped back and communication with all Field Teams was thus cut.

IT WAS night on Simpar. The triple moons, blood red, arced across the night sky. There were no more ships. The freed slaves, eyes wide and wild in the torchlight

raced through the plundered streets. Throughout Solom, the capitol city of Simpar, Andro and Calna could hear distant crashes, faint screams as the last of the traders and buyers were hunted down and murdered. They had underestimated the unreasoning fury of the slaves, and thus found themselves in danger. Slaves dressed in the fineries of the traders and buyers and were themselves killed by their fellows.

Thrice Andro had to stand and fight and kill in order to clear their path through the city. The first scattered revolts on the planet had been orderly, and the freed slaves had been spirited away on the captured ships without incident. But this past night when the last of the fortified marts and dens and mansions of the traders and the government had fallen completely was nightmare.

Andro found a grim humor in having to stand and do battle with slaves who died screaming his name, as though it were a magic incantation.

At last they were out of the city. Fires burned unchecked in the heart of the city. At one place flames rose hundreds of feet into the air. The dark plain was ahead of them, and in the darkness they meant to find the slanting tunnel down to the hidden ship.

"Now have we won?" Andro demanded as he hurried along beside her.

"I'll know when we reach the ship. If we've won, we cannot reach any other known era."

The hidden entrance to the tunnel was less than a mile ahead. They ran on, and the night seemed endless as the clamor of the city faded behind them.

Solin's ship, containing the other agent who had replaced Calna, hung poised and invisible fifty feet above the mouth of the tunnel. The screens were adjusted to make the plain that stretched out toward the city as bright and clear as though it were bathed in sunshine.

He watched the tiny figures approaching.

He knew who the first two were. The third one, the one who followed them, was unknown to him.

Solin felt the tiny shudder and turned almost in anger to Arla, the woman Agent who had replaced Calna. "It's pointless to keep trying," he said, "we're beyond the point where we can return."

The woman dropped her hands from the panel and turned toward him. Her expression was bleak and hopeless. Her shoulders sagged. She glanced at the screen. "Soon they'll be near enough."

"There seems to be no point in killing them now," Solin said.

Arla gasped. "But it was an order! Your service with that Calna has made you a poor Agent, Solin. You heard the order."

"We're trapped here in Four. They can't reach us and we can't reach them. So why kill them? The damage is already done."

"It was an order," the woman said.

Solin sighed. He sometimes wondered if the male-female teams were not a mistake. According to Field Team theory, it made for a more flexible unit, increased the time that could be spent by any single Team on any single assignment. But it did give rise to a great many petty irritations.

"We took so long finding the tunnel," the woman said. "That's what trapped us here. We can make it worth while now by following orders."

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Might of Deralan

**D**ERALAN, on arrival at Simpar, had been clapped into one of the feeding pens for fattening. He listened to the rumors that brightened the eyes of the one who had been in the pen before his shipment had arrived. Rumors of freedom. Rumors of revolt. They heard violence in the city for many days and nights and at last they were released. The

guards were slain and the walls broken down and the gates smashed and the great house where the trader and pen-owner had lived set afire.

Deralan trotted into the city with the rest of them and there he heard the word that he had suspected, that he had not wanted to believe.

"Andro!" they shouted. "Andro of Galvan!" It was rallying cry, battle cry, blood scream. "Andro!"

With sickness in his throat, Deralan dodged into the mouth of an alley and waited until the running steps had thudded into the distance. Dusk had changed slowly to night before he found a lone slave he could overpower.

"What of this Andro? Quick, while you live!"

"Please! He is said to be in the city. He has come back. His face is changed, but he has come back."

"Where can I find him?"

"I don't know. Believe me, I don't know!"

Deralan made a quick and practiced gesture and then flung the body from him. He joined another wolf pack, snatched a torch, held it high, looked endlessly for a man with the huge strong body of Andro of Galvan.

He found a knife with a blade that suited him. He looted and burned and shouted with the others, but always he searched for Andro. He lost track of the hours. And at last he found a big man who stood with a fair-haired girl behind him and fought well, fought with the skill to be expected of any noble of the House of Galvan. He seemed about to be overpowered when the girl stepped to the side and something gleamed in her hand. The three who still faced the big man folded and dropped into absurdly small heaps on the paving stones.

As the big man turned, the torchlight touched his upper arm. Deralan sucked in his breath as he saw the pale rectangular patch. As they hurried on, Deralan looked

at the three bodies. He swallowed hard. Something that swept across them, something the girl had used, had apparently completely removed whole sections of the men's torsos. That was why the huddled bodies looked so small.

He flung the torch aside to gutter out and followed the man and the girl through the smoke drift of the streets, his fingers hard and tight on the haft of the knife.

Deralan followed them out of the city and across the dark plain. The three dark moons stretched three vague shadows of his crouched body as he followed them. As the ground grew more uneven, he shortened the distance between them. He reversed the knife in his grasp. It had a good balance. Andro's back was broad. Deralan raised the knife. He poised it. He hurled it with all his strength. In the fractional part of a second before he released it, a great light bathed the entire plain in green-white brilliance. During the last six inches of the swing of his arm it seemed to Deralan that some great outside force had taken his arm and had given it a whip and power beyond anything any man should possess. The odd power snapped the bones of his arm and hurled him screaming into blackness.

Solin sat with his hand on the port control, completely frozen by an astonishment so vast that he could not move. Arla had asked to perform the actual execution. Solin had been glad to comply as he had no heart for it. He opened the port for her and when she had the hand weapon readied, he lighted the target area for her. Andro and Calna were in perfect range, a hundred yards away and fifty feet below them. In the instant of touching the lights he had seen the third figure in the act of hurling what seemed to be a knife at the pair leading him.

The unknown man had hurled the knife. There had been a keening whistle indicative of high velocity and a full-throated chunk. Arla had fallen dead with the knife blade

in her brain, the guard of the haft flat against her forehead.

No person could throw a knife that way. Yet they had. He had seen it. The thrower lay crumpled on the ground with both Andro and Calna staring at him.

Solin dropped the ship to the ground beside the hidden tunnel entrance. He stepped over Arla's body and out into the now restricted area of green-white light.

**T**RANSITION rested in Era 3 beside the endless thunder of the space port.

The Socionetics Board had launched a full scale investigation of the circumstances surrounding the loss of Era 4, and the loss of the thirty-odd Field Teams who had been trapped there when the index of probability dropped below the point where Agent ship power could accomplish the return.

The Board was exercising its prerogative of interviewing the staff members, one at a time. The Board met in the huge central chamber with the luminescent mural depicting the eventual merger of twenty-six co-existent worlds. Though now, of course, there were only twenty-four and thus the mural was, in that sense, a rather wry joke.

After three weeks of review and deliberation, the Director was called in to hear the decision of the Board.

The decision was very simple and very direct. It was given to him in the form of an order. Improper controls and criminal laxness have lost us two complete spheres of eventual cultural expansion. There will no longer be a continuing effort to accelerate the extrapolated cultural pattern of all backward eras simultaneously. All Field Teams will be concentrated on one era. All existing equipment will be immediately altered to make only that era, plus the basic three, available to Agent ships. Era 20 is closest to unity status. All effort is to be concentrated there. If, by any chance, Era



20 should be lost to us, all Field Team activities will be cancelled. No further acceleration of cultures will be attempted. All equipment except one master ship will be altered so as to permit only slip between basic eras. Periodic surveys with the master ship will be made. When each peripheral culture has attained proper probability status, then unity will be undertaken, but it will achieve that status in its own way and in its own time.

"And if unity is achieved with Era 20 without trouble?" the Director asked in a low voice.

"Then all effort will be concentrated on the next era closest to a possible unity status."

The Director was permitted to leave. He gave the orders he was required to give. He gave an additional one of his own. He called all remaining Field Teams in for complete indoctrination on Era 20, for re-training, for re-analysis.

THIRTY-THREE Field Teams trapped in Era 4. Count Andro and Calna, and subtract Arla. Sixty-seven persons. So few. So very few.

The golden pyramidal ships sat in a closed circle in such a way that the shields combined to form a cone of silence. The cone rose black and tall near the palaces of Rael.

In the streets they said, in hushed tones, "The Great Ones speak again together."

Andro had matured in the past months. Authority was stamped on his face, and dignity was imprinted on each movement.

"It is time to speak," he said after a long silence. "I do not pretend to know how you are trapped here. It has been explained to me. I have been told that my activities caused this era to diverge from some pattern or other. You say that this era has become less probable, in relation to your basic eras. Be that as it may. The damage was done. You were trapped. Through the urging of Solin and Calna,

you consented to help me impose my will on what is left of Empire. That has been done. There is no more resistance. We are the object of superstitious awe on every inhabited planet of Empire. Now you must feel that your task is ended. I say to you that it is not ended. With your consent, I wish to make you my agents, give each of you an area to govern until such time as self-government is possible. You have been told the things in which I believe. You do not need specific orders. It is not easy to be considered a god, as I now am. If you do your assigned tasks properly, there will come a time when I am no longer considered to be a god. That time will come long after all of us have died. I am urging this course because it seems to me that in this way this era can be gently guided back toward a point where eventually your own people will once again be able to make contact."

The trapped Agents showed no great enthusiasm.

Calna took Andro's place and spoke. "I urge you to accept. Through the incident of Arla's death, we have a piece of knowledge that they do not have back at Transition. We know now that while we were attempting to build backward eras up to the point where unity could be achieved, a stronger force was seeking to make all frames divergent. We do not know what that stronger force is. In my own case, I know I was guided when I set this entire pattern in motion. I suspected it then. I know it now. One thing is puzzling. Why was Deralan made the agent of saving Andro and myself from certain death? Divergence had already been achieved. Why was it done in such a way that we would learn of this outside force which interferes with the achievement of unity for our co-existent eras? There is one possible answer. We were saved so that we could be the focal point of this successful effort of the past few months. We were advised of outside interference so that we should

be able to content ourselves with these new limitations."

Solin spoke. "Content ourselves? How is that meant?"

"Through knowledge that we are part of a master plan guided by some race, some civilization whose abilities make ours look like the efforts of children," Calna replied.

"What sort of master plan is it which keeps the basic eras from achieving unity with all sister probability frames? That seems like progress in the wrong direction," another Agent said with a note of anger.

"I say," said Solin, "that now that we have given Andro the assistance he asked, we should concentrate on using what skills and talents we have to devise a power source ample enough to enable us to slip back to our own era."

There was a mutter of agreement. Andro turned to Calna and shrugged.

He said to all of them, "I see that Solin's suggestion is your wish. So be it." He looked at Calna. "You will work with them?"

"I made my choice quite a long time ago," she said. Together they went back to the palaces where new laws were being written for a galactic race.

**D**ERALAN knew at last that the madness was leaving him. It began to leave when he was willing to admit to himself that he had been mad. Something had swept across his brain, twisting it, convulsing it. At last he recognized his environment, knew with a sense of shock that he was in a cell deep under the main palace, a cell that he had filled and emptied many times in what now seemed like a previous incarnation.

Co-mingled with his weariness and lethargy was a new, odd sense of mental power, as though the twisting force had also liberated areas of his brain that had previously been dormant. Throughout the uncounted days of torment he had heard a

constant shrill chorus of thin voices, as though he lay in the midst of a vast throng of children at play. Now he could bring back the voices at will, merely by *reaching* to hear them.

When food was brought, one of the shrill voices separated itself from the others and became so distinct that he could understand scattered phrases, "—should be executed—Andro will decide—so many things changed—the Great Ones—"

And slowly Deralan came to know that he was *listening* to the thoughts of those near him. For a long time he listened. With practice he grew more acute, more certain of this new power. Once, when food was brought on an earthen dish, he willed the movement of opening the fingers of his right hand, not opening them, but willing the movement to open them with all his strength. The guard stared stupidly down at the smashed dish and scattered food. He massaged his fingers for a few moments.

With this start, Deralan began to practice with great care, making sure that what he was doing remain undiscovered. He found he could trip those who walked by the cell. At times he wondered if it was merely madness, but there was the evidence of his eyes and ears to be considered.

When he was certain of himself he caused a guard to leave the cell door unlocked. Deralan walked out. It was simplicity itself to cause every other guard to look the other way. He walked through as though invisible. He climbed the flights of stairs up to ground level and went out through all the gates into the streets of the city. He found a man of his own general build and guided the man into a narrow place between two buildings and caused the man to strip and don the prison garments. The man obeyed with an utterly blank expression, with no sign of confusion or fear.

Suddenly Deralan realized how pointless this attempt at escape was. This inexplicable gift which had been thrust upon him

at the moment of hurling the knife was too powerful to be used for such a petty affair as escape. He turned soberly and walked back toward the main palace.

He found Andro and the fair-haired girl of the dark plain in the apartments that had once belonged to Shain. He sent the guards striding woodenly down the corridor and entered through the arched doorway.

Andro stared at him, his eyes widening. "Deralan!" he gasped.

"Where is Shain?"

"Shain is dead by his own hand. Larrent and Masec are in exile."

"You are Emperor?"

"The last one, Deralan. How did you get by the guards?"

"How do you plan to dispose of me?"

"By trial. You'll receive justice."

He stood and listened to their thoughts, first sorting out Andro's, then the woman's. Andro was merely puzzled, not afraid. The woman intrigued him. Two voices seemed to come from her. One from here and now. Another background voice that spoke of far places and wondrous things and skills beyond imagining, of others like her who were nearby. He related it immediately to the thoughts of the guards who had spoken of the Great Ones. He changed his plan immediately. He had intended to kill them both, setting them against each other to kill. But these two were not the real opposition.

"Take me to your people," he said aloud to the woman. She reached for a glittering object which hung from her wide belt. He remembered the three who died so quickly and strangely on Simpar. He made her fling the glittering object into a corner. Her eyes widened with fear and then assumed the familiar blankness. She came with him as he willed her to walk. Andro gave a hoarse cry of alarm and Deralan forced him back into a far corner, left him standing there.

The woman guided him to a place just outside the city where a ring of golden

pyramidal objects stood around a building that was new, oddly constructed, covered with hoods and twisted screens of wire.

The woman took him into the building where there were scores of people at work. They stared at him oddly. These were the enemy.

In the center of the floor was the cube on which they worked. Cables as big around as a man's thigh writhed away from the cube. A shining metal column rose upward from the cube through the roof high overhead.

Deralan looked at the cube and he was puzzled. He had a feeling of *wrongness*. He stared at it and saw wrongness, and an obscure clumsiness, and a childish ineffectuality. He walked closer to it and in his mind saw the image of the way it should be. The people were forgotten. Only the power cube was important. He brushed by those who tried to bar the way and reached into the cube where tiny tubes glowed and

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relays chattered. Slowly at first, and then with increasing dexterity he began to take down circuits. As they tried to pull him away, he turned with impatience and smote them back with a careless easy power of the mind which sent them sprawling. Soon he noted that they were helping him, and he heard his own voice giving instructions that sounded meaningless and yet had a sound of *rightness* as opposed to the *wrongness* he was eliminating.

After fifty hours of ceaseless labor the work was done. The blue cube was like nothing any of the exiled Agents had ever seen before. It utilized only a fractional part of the power they had hooked up to lead into it. It had ceased to be a cube and had become a geometric form which dizzied them as they looked at it. It had nine sides, yet only ten edges. The effect was mildly hypnotic, and the attempt to relate visual evidence to known geometric forms gave it the look of being in constant flux.

Deralan had collapsed the moment the work was finished. They had taken him to a couch. His eyes were wide and he babbled endlessly and sucked at his fingers.

The cables led to one of the Agent ships which had been brought as close as possible to the main entrance to the building.

Calna looked at them all in anger. "Are we to be superstitious children? Are we to be afraid of this? He was used before, by 'them'. Now he has been 'used' again. Once he had fulfilled his purpose, he was discarded."

"What will it do?" Solin asked.

"I say it will do just what it was intended to do. Take us back to our own era," she said.

Hesitation faded. Two Agents stepped into the ship and port folded shut behind them. The others watched, expecting the mistiness which would indicate that the ship had slipped properly. Instead the ship was just . . . gone. The heavy cables fell to the ground and the air, rushing into the place where the ship had been, made a

sound like the cracking of a great whip.

One by one they departed. Solin was last. He left alone in the ship which he had shared with Arla. There was one golden ship left. And Calna. Andro had come. He watched her thoughtfully.

"You may go," he said.

"I shall stay here, Andro. I belong now."

She went back to the palace with him.

THE long days went by. Often she went to a high window from which she could see the building in which the cube throbbed and shifted. Many times she walked to that place and watched the cube and touched her fingers lightly to the side of the small golden ship.

Andro sensed her discontent. He was busy with the new structure of government which he was building carefully. There was little that they could share.

She remembered other days, and other times, and realized more strongly each day how savage and primitive an era this was.

*In a place that was no-place and in a time that was no-time, the thought record halted and waited. It waited, not in the sense of elapsing time, but in the sense of an endless interruption. Impatience was not known to the intelligence directing the record. Other endless computations continued. But the directing intelligence, which did exist in a finite, though variable, space time, felt a subtle irritation.*

*This particular phase of this particular problem had been completed. The basic questions had been answered. An unseen hand had reached into the remote past, had twisted probabilities to the ultimate degree of distortion. In its simplest sense, false worlds had been created. The historical derivations had been weighed. Cause-effects had been measured in all temporal directions.*

*And now the ultimate step in the problem was held in stasis, merely because of the almost unpredictable whim of a female who, being a structural portion of an ex-*

periment in improbability, was herself improbable. . . .

HE CAME to her as she stood at the high window, and he said, "You must return. I know that. Come back, if it can be done, and if you have the desire. I can keep you a prisoner no longer."

"Not a prisoner, Andro."

"You must go back."

"I will return if I can. But you're right."

They went to the golden ship where the cables were already attached, waiting.

She turned as she entered the port, and lifted her hand slowly. Her eyes were misted. She turned quickly to the controls. The port folded shut.

And thus, with the whip crack of her departure, the universe itself, Andro's time and place and cities and suns and planets and wars and history—snapped out as though a quick finger had touched the light switch, leaving a room in darkness. The webs of probability had been pulled tight, twisted. And now the pressure was released. The record had been kept. The experiment was over.

Probability is like a plastic which is formed with a molecular "memory." It can be distorted, but once released, it will revert.

The reversion will be a function of time, rather than space. Tangential worlds can be artificially created. So long as the artificial pressure is maintained, they will seem to "exist." But with the release of that pressure. . . .

THE Agent Ship had plunged into the crust of Zeran in Era 4, powerless to save the sole remaining ship, the flagship of Andro's fleet. The crippled flagship swung lower, out of control. Solin, at the controls of the Agent ship, picked up the crippled ship in his screens and swung up through the planet crust in order to be within close range in case anything might be done. He halted the Agent ship twenty feet below

ground level just as the crippled ship landed with a tremendous jarring crash.

Calna moved up behind him and watched the screen over Solin's shoulder. A powerful man staggered out through the huge rent in the skin of the ship, dragging an unconscious dark-haired girl. They saw him glance up at the dark skies, his face twisted with fury and anger. He fumbled for a pulse in the girl's throat, then stood silently, shoulders slumped, in stoic grief. Again he searched the blackness overhead, and ran into the city. His wounds had weakened him. He weaved as he ran, but he tugged a weapon from his holster.

"Can we save him once more?" Calna asked calmly.

"Not this time. They've seen him run into the city."

"At least we could follow. Report the end of it."

They took the portable screen from the rack, left the ship standing there, sliced through the depths of the city, following Andro in his blundering run. They saw him take refuge in a blind alley, shadowed by the eternal blue dusk. They saw him brace his shoulders against the wall, waiting for them to find him.

Calna and Solin waited directly below him.

Soon the dying man was spotted. He used the weapon well. His last shot was fired from within the boundary of death itself, the finger tightening in the last convulsion. Deralan came and cautiously inspected the body. He signaled to the others to take the body away.

Solin started back along the fresh tunnel, but Calna did not follow. He turned and stared at her. "What is it?"

"I . . . I don't know. A very odd feeling. As though somehow we have made a mistake that we could not predict. We should have cut up through to him, saved him."

"And turn a decent rebellion into a pseudo-religious revival?" Solin said.

(Continued on page 111)



He looked like Buddha and  
like a baby . . . as big as a man  
and half again as wide. . .

# COSMIC



# KNOT

By  
**PETER  
REED**

*Franzie's dimension-spanning hands were worth millions to a ruthless promoter—if he could manage to stay out of them. . . .*

**A**RTHUR BLAUDEN'S thin nose wrinkled with distaste as he climbed the narrow staircase to the Cryzc apartment. The odor in the stairwell was composed of equal parts of cabbage, faulty plumbing and economic despair.

It had all seemed so romantic, back in college, doing case work that would reveal at last the workings of immutable sociological laws. But in three years of field work as a social worker, Arthur Blauden had found, to his ultimate distress, that though he loved mankind as a whole, he detested its individual unwashed components.

Take this fantastic Cryzc family as an example. Sitting down in the department car parked in the littered street, Arthur Blauden had looked over his original report on the case and refreshed his memory, concentration a bit impaired by a noisy game of stickball in the same block.

A DP family, they were, from some Balkan fragment of a country, now using up good tax dollars. A pity.

He knocked on the door. Firmly. He heard footsteps inside and the door opened. A weary-looking woman with a broad expressionless face stared at him for a moment and then a smile broke like an unexpected sunrise.

"Friend, friend," she shouted. She swung the door wide. "Come!"

Arthur went in and sat cautiously on the edge of a chair, his black briefcase across his knees. The husband came out of another room, knuckling sleep-puffed eyes, wearing an underwear top and work pants. Small grubby faces peered around corners. Too many small grubby faces.

"Really!" Arthur said, counting them.

The couple stared at him. The man was huge, husky, bovine.

"They told me you need more money," Arthur said severely, raising his voice as he always did when speaking to this sort. At the sound of authority, the woman made an old-world curtsy, born of habit.

"More money, yah," the man said, nodding his head violently. "More."

"Aren't you working? You know. Working!" Arthur shouted.

"Working? Yah. Forty dollar week working."

They, thought Arthur, are really too, too stupid. The department would not only disapprove the request for more welfare, but would very probably cut the existing amount.

"Why do you need more?" he shouted. "Why more money? Why?"

The man and woman looked at each other. The gutturals of their own language leapt, snapped, crackled. They both stared dubiously at Arthur.

"Must say?" Mr. Cryzc asked.

"No say, no money," Arthur said, feeling quite pleased with the simplicity of the ultimatum.

The woman plucked at the cheap cloth of her dress. She looked at the floor, pointed shyly at a closed door with her finger. "Food: Food for Franzie."

Arthur checked his old report form. "Franz. Your eldest. He should be six by now. Surely a six year old doesn't eat very much."

"Eat much," the woman said solemnly. "Eat much. Eat . . ."

"I heard you, my dear woman. Let me see this child that . . . Oh, I see. He is sick and needs special food. Is that it?"

"Not sick," the man said sullenly.

Arthur stood up. "I'll take a look at the boy."

They made no move toward the door. "Not make laugh," the woman said, staring down at the frayed rug, "Please not make laugh, sir."

"Of course I won't laugh," Arthur said with a waspish voice.

The woman spoke to the man. The man went to the door. He turned the key in the lock and then slid back the bolt that Arthur had not noticed before.

The man stood aside and Arthur walked in. He recoiled violently and far enough to take him backwards out of the room. He made a thin gasping sound.

"No be afraid," Mr. Cryzc said.

**A**RTHUR went in more cautiously and took a second look. The child sat in the middle of a double bed. He looked like Buddha, and like a baby and like Winston Churchill, and also like a caricature in yellowish lard as big as a man and half again as wide. He looked at Arthur with small unwinking eyes set into a vast

wide flat face. Arthur had seen that sort of expression on the faces of the blind, but he knew that this . . . this child wasn't blind. It was vision turned inward.

"Does . . . it talk?" Arthur asked.

"One time much talk. Now no more," Mrs. Cryzc said.

There was no denying the flicker of intelligence in the eyes. When it moved big hands, the meaty slabs of muscle on the shoulders and arms moved slothfully.

"Eat much," Mr. Cryzc said.

"And I should well imagine that he would," Arthur said softly.

"Ah?" said Mrs. Cryzc.

"Nothing," Arthur said.

"All time ties knots," Mr. Cryzc said jovially.

"What? He what?" Arthur asked.

"Waiting, please," Mr. Cryzc said. He trotted out of the room. He came back in a moment with four lengths of dirty clothes-line, each piece about two feet long.

"Watch knots," Mr. Cryzc said. He threw Franzie a length of line. The big hands caught it. The eyes looked into Arthur's eyes. Arthur could have sworn they held a look of amused contempt.

Franzie looked down at the length of rope. The big hands moved with darting speed. Arthur had been an eagle scout. But after the first two twists he was lost. The knot grew. Loop and twist and this end through here and that through there. Then the giant child found both ends and tugged. Arthur could have sworn that the rope was somehow pulled "through" itself into nothingness.

"Huh!" he said hollowly.

Mr. Cryzc threw Franzie another piece of rope. He pushed hard against Arthur's shoulder, and Arthur ended up right beside the bed.

"Watch. Do slow, Franzie. Do slow for the sir."

Franzie built the complicated knot slowly. Once again he tugged. There was no rope.

"A trick. Sleight of hand," Arthur said.

They could not attract its attention again. It was as though they had ceased to exist. They went out into the other room. Arthur sat down as though clubbed behind the knees. He took out a handkerchief and dabbed delicately at his forehead.

"Fourth dimension," he babbled, "Incredible. Some sort of mutation. I . . ."

Mr. Cryzc tapped his wife on the shoulder and then thumped himself on the chest. "Not from us, that Franzie. Giff my name. Cryzc. Find Franzie in boosh. DP camp. Nobody know. Big flash-boom in night. Nobody know what. Find Franzie in morning."

Arthur Blauden's mind skipped nimbly from Mars to Venus and sped back to Earth with an idea that seemed better the clearer it became.

"Would you give up Franzie?" he asked.

They looked at each other. They argued in their own language.

"Must have good home."

"My dear woman, he would have a far bet. . . . He would be well cared for, Mrs. Cryzc. The best doctors. All the food he wants. And he'll see the world. Just for a few hours a day he'll tie knots for people who come to see him."

"Circus?" Mr. Cryzc demanded, an acquisitive gleam in his eye.

Arthur caught himself in time. "No," he lied, "just a few doctors and professors. To see if . . . ah . . . they can help him."

"Come get tomorrow?" Mr. Cryzc asked. Arthur nodded. "Better bring truck," said Mr. Cryzc grimly, "Last time out on street, people throwing stones."

Arthur went lightly down the stairs. He hurried out to the car. There was a great deal to do. Adoption papers would be the soundest legal device. In the back of his mind was the sonorous sound of the barker's voice. ". . . and Franzie, the creature not of Earth. See him tie golden ropes into nothingness . . ."

As the car turned the corner he was mentally wording his resignation.

**F**ORTY-EIGHT hours later Arthur Blauden stood in the living room of his apartment staring at Franzie who sat on a double mattress on the floor, looking out the window.

For an hour he had been trying to attract Franzie's attention. A pile of lengths of rope stood on the floor.

"Tie some knots!" he screamed.

Arthur picked up a piece of rope and tried to put it in Franzie's hand. It slipped to the mattress.

The man in the deep chair sighed and stood up. "Can't waste any more time, Blauden. He's a monster all right, but hell, the woods are full of 'em. Now if he could do that rope trick, I'd have your signature on a contract in a minute. The marks would go for that rope trick."

"But I tell you he can do it!" Arthur Blauden wailed.

"But he don't want to, maybe. And we get him under the freak top and the talker yaks it up and he don't do it for the people. No, Blauden. No dice."

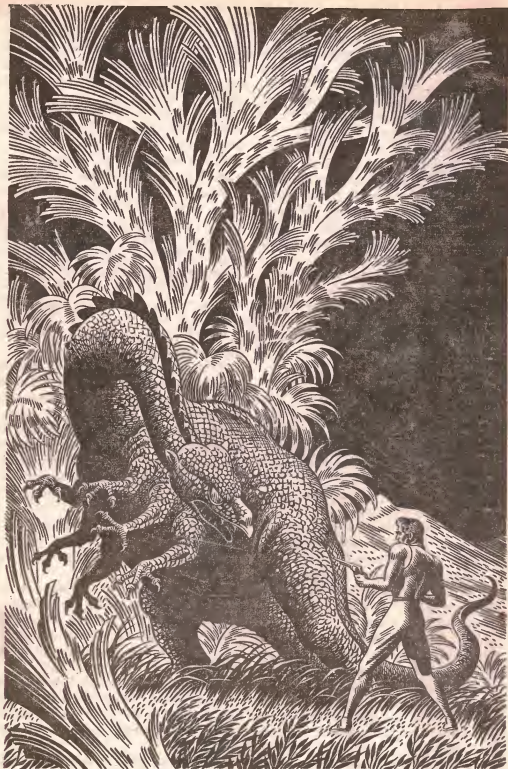
The man left. Arthur breathed hard for long moments. Suddenly Franzie came to be the symbol of the years of frustration.

Arthur snatched up one of the rope ends. He began to whip wildly at Franzie's head and shoulders. The rope was thick and it whistled in the air. It bit deeply into the flat cheek and a greenish fluid began to ooze from the place where the skin was broken.

Arthur suddenly found himself on his back on the mattress and unwinking eyes with the coldness of space in their depths looked down into his. Arthur was able to scream twice. He could not manage the third scream.

Franzie worked hard over the problem. It was difficult. The material was stubborn, but it could be forced. It made crackling noises as he forced it. At last it was quite ready.

He grasped Arthur's protruding thumb and middle toe and gave the necessary tug.





# STAR SLAVE

★ *Born to serve his masters was Marko—the overlords to whom he granted every privilege save extinction!* ★

By WILLIAM MORRISON and HARRY NIX

MARKO and his compatriots worked in the steaming heat of the sun, while guards stood nearby and shouted orders which were promptly and efficiently obeyed. In his vague and silent way—like all his friends—Marko was aware of the throbbing heat, of the new environment where they labored, and of the masters who commanded them. But the lush and mysterious surroundings provoked no question from any of his group; and working for his lords gave him an inordinate pride, vaguely and silently—a labor of love which had placed a catatonic smile upon his ugly mouth. Occasionally one of the workers would stumble and collapse, from exhaustion and the heat, and the guards would order him dragged away from the working area, where he would lie until strength returned and he could join the others. But Marko neither suspected nor cared that all of his group were regarded as expendable.

On into the night the unloading of the supply ship continued, broken only by brief rest-periods ordered by one of the

guards. At such times, the laborers would relax against the trunks of weird, un-Earthly trees or the fuselages of the ships that had brought them to this strange world. And Marko, smiling his ugly smile, would look upon the silhouettes of his fellows against the night sky, and he would feel an unspeakable joy that he and his friends—with bodies misshapen by normal human standards, with arms and legs too long and heads too large—lived only to please their little masters who were so great, who were right in all their words and actions, who were so human.

During one of the rest-periods in the night, while Marko leaned against the side of the officers' ship, he overheard a conversation going on inside between the expedition's captain and a lieutenant.

"I notice, sir," the young lieutenant said, "that the Subs have been unloading the supply ship this evening. Surely you did not give such orders, did you?"

"I gave the orders this afternoon," the captain said firmly. "Don't tell me you didn't know we're staying."

"Staying?" The lieutenant was incredulous. "Staying here, Captain? But we've

Now it was a deadly  
game of tag. . . .

missed our goal, sir. You said yourself that we had gone astray in space."

"So we did. But for all we know, this may be the work of destiny—if you believe in such things. You see, Lieutenant, our reconnaissance of the immediate territory this morning proved that this planet is very nearly as inhabitable as the Earth. So, since we're this fortunate, why take chances—not only with out faulty directional equipment, but with a planet of which we know comparatively nothing? No, Lieutenant, we're going to colonize here."

"But if this planet's so similar to Earth—and I agree that it is, except for the lack of human life—there won't be much adventure, will there?" The lieutenant was disappointed. "I mean, sir, it'll be dull, won't it?"

The captain laughed. "Dull? I seriously doubt it. There's a lot to be done here. We officers shall handle the plans and administration, and the Subs shall execute our orders."

"Oh, yes, Captain—the Subs. When this unloading is finished, sir, we shall kill them off—is that right?"

"You know my policy." The captain's voice was stern. "We never kill unless absolutely necessary."

"But it is necessary, sir. There are fifty of us men and women. There are also fifty Subs, male and female. You know how fast they multiply."

"Would you suggest we use the robots?" the captain asked. "I have considered doing so, but we shall leave the robots to rust, after all. They are not nearly as useful as the Subs have proved to be."

"But these creatures might turn out to be dangerous, sir."

"Don't worry, Lieutenant. We can control them. Remember that our ancestors experimented for five generations, and it is our generation that inherits this perfect result. They have physical strength, as well as the will to follow, and we have the brains. That is a kind of equality, isn't it?"

"But I think it's better to get rid of them, sir, before they have a chance to outnumber us."

"We have the brains," the captain repeated, "so we—the Supers—shall rule. And we never kill unless absolutely necessary."

Marko heard all this and understood, with an insecure sense, what the two men meant. But his thoughts were conceived only as essential ideas that embraced the spirit of meanings, and it was thus that he understood the captain and the lieutenant. When he returned to the unloading of equipment, he felt equally close to both officers, for whatever any Super said was unquestionably right.

AS HE worked, his old desire returned to him again. He wanted more than merely to be good to the Supers, regardless of rank or responsibility. He wanted even more than to accomplish the tasks he was assigned, more than to protect them from danger. For, incredible as it would have seemed to any human being, Marko had an ambition. He wanted, above all else in this little universe, to rescue a Super facing death, a Super for whom he could give his own life, who would live at the expense of his martyrdom. It was an ambition as old as Marko himself, and each time it returned it seemed more vital to him than before. But he kept the secret, and he worked without attracting attention.

The unloading was finished during the night, and the Subs made beds on dead leaves from strange trees. While the Supers were sleeping comfortably in the ships, Marko and his compatriots accepted their lot with no feeling of injustice. For he loved the Supers, and except for his one ambition, Marko had no regard of self.

Long after the others were asleep, he lay awake. From the jungle growth around them came sounds which he had never

heard before—odd cries and wails and screeches which he guessed were coming from animals. They were ugly sounds—and anything ugly was bad for the Supers. But Marko was not afraid. He still had his ambition, the unprogressing idea which revolved statically in his mind. But he had no ability to make plans for his ambition.

At dawn, the female Subs prepared breakfast in the makeshift kitchen set up the day before. When the Supers had eaten, the Subs were called in for their meal. As Marko was entering the dining area, he met the captain, the captain's wife, and the lieutenant who had spoken to the captain the night before.

"Oh, Marko!" the captain called. "I want you to take four others in your gang and go with the lieutenant this morning. I heard some beasts last night which I think we'd better clear out of here. You *can* shoot a radiation gun, can't you?"

"I shoot," Marko said, grinning with the sense of being complimented. "I shoot!"

The captain's wife, a yellow-haired woman with a high voice, stepped forward and pointed at Marko. "Really," she said to her husband, "you're not trusting this thing—this monster—to shoot animals, are you?"

"I'm handling this," he told her sharply.

"If you don't mind, sir," the lieutenant said, "I'm afraid I agree with your wife—"

"But I do mind," the captain said. "If these Subs can be of help, why not use them? Remember, Lieutenant, they multiply fast. What's the loss of a few?"

So Marko was sent on the detail in search of animals. The Subs had been trained on Earth to shoot radiation guns, but this was the first time their training might be employed. Marko and his four companions walked ahead, clearing the brush and tangled growth for the lieutenant, who rode slowly behind in an armored car. If one of the Subs lagged or was too slow for the young officer, a command of "Speed it up there!" would send the Sub darting ahead,

more afraid of reproof from a Super than of any unknown dangers before them.

Marko, who observed things which no lofty-minded Super had time for, noticed tiny animals scurrying out of the grass. They half-hopped and half-flew, with tails that spread fanwise and supported them in their flight. He did not think that anything so small could make the noises of the night before, and these little things seemed harmless in their running. There must be something else—other beasts to run from! He grew more cautious as he moved forward.

Since there was no overt danger, the lieutenant, on the other hand, lost some of his fear. Riding in his armored car, he looked about him, his face noncommittally blank, as though he were lost in his plans for the future. Thus he did not see that the Subs, speeded by his urging, were now far in advance, going dutifully onward without looking back his way. The lieutenant was not aware of his own imminent danger until a gigantic paw struck with the force of an explosion and spun the car over on its side.

Marko spun around. A monstrous gray beast, with a sharp-muzzled head and hind feet like pedestals, was tearing with its six short forelegs at the dent it had made in the armored car. As Marko ran to the scene, he saw the lieutenant, dazed as he was, searching vainly about in the car for his lost radiation gun. A piece of armor was torn from the vehicle and went whizzing past Marko's head, at which point he began firing his own gun at the beast. Then the other Subs fired, too, and the creature staggered back, screaming in a high and piercing voice that was all but inaudible to human ears. It released its grip on the car and plunged at its attackers.

Now it was a deadly game of tag. The first Sub to die shrieked and fell under the animal's paw. The others, still firing, turned and fled in terror. So Marko, at last, was offered an opportunity to save a

Super's life, and he acted instinctively. Firing his own gun, he picked up the gun of another Sub, who had fallen, and aimed the two weapons at the beast. Firing both guns with simultaneous repetition, he advanced fearlessly, while the creature shrieked and flailed about, until the rays of the guns cut a concentrated line across the animal's middle. Then, like a toppling tower, the savage attacker divided and fell, writhing separately until it died at Marko's feet.

Marko went to the battered armored car and found that the lieutenant was unconscious. He slung the young officer over his shoulder and started shambling back to the landing area, feeling that his ambition had been fulfilled. And yet—and yet, not quite!

**B**ACK at the officers' ship, Marko's arrival with the lieutenant caused great alarm. The captain received him in his private office, focusing the attention of the entire expedition on Marko. "Wild one," Marko explained. "Wild one tears up car."

"You mean an *animal* destroyed the lieutenant's car?" the captain asked.

Marko nodded. "He is strong."

The captain shook his head dubiously. "Take us there, Marko. I have to see for myself."

So he guided the captain and a few members of the official staff through the jungle to the scene of the attack. As Marko walked beside the captain, he felt close to him, closer than ever before, even closer than he had felt to the lieutenant whose life he had saved.

The Supers examined the carcass of the beast, and the captain looked up with surprise. "This thing tears through armor?" he asked.

Marko nodded. "He tears armor."

"How big is it, when alive?" the captain asked.

Marko rose to his maximum height, then

reached one arm into the air. "Big, Captain." But his measurement was ineffectual.

One of the officers bent over the ferocious-looking head, and tried with a knife to cut off one of the tiny ears. The knife made not a scratch. "This thing must be made of steel," he said.

"Try my diamond knife," the captain suggested.

The sharp-edged synthetic diamond made a slight dent in the gray hide. "Yes," the examining officer said, "I think this will do it."

In the days that followed, the dead beast was analyzed in the expedition's laboratory, and the analysis proved that the creature was not as resistant to chemicals as to the mechanical processes of grinding and cutting. After being hacked with a diamond saw, thin slices of the "flesh" were ground to bits in a diamond mill, and a series of spectroscopic analyses led to some interesting conclusions.

Marko overheard the analyst's report, though he could not understand it. "There is a high proportion of tantalum, tungsten, molybdenum, and other metals which play either no role in human metabolism, or a very minor one. The metals are, somehow, the basis of organic compounds that have extraordinary mechanical strength. You might call them carbide derivatives."

"Never mind that," the captain said sharply. "What can we do about them?"

"Not a great deal," the analyst admitted. "We could poison them by poisoning the smaller animals they feed upon, but that would eventually poison our own food too. Their cell structure indicates a susceptibility to virus infections, but the viruses would naturally spread to other and more valuable forms of life. I'm afraid that the only real solution is to radiate them to death."

"But that means they'll have to be hunted down, one by one."

"Yes, Captain. The danger can't be avoided."

"Well, at least we have the Subs."

The young lieutenant, who had fully recovered from his shock, spoke now. "But, sir, I still don't think the Subs are competent to handle radiation guns. Like your wife said the other day—"

"Shut up!" the captain snapped. "So you don't think they're competent. After Marko saved your life, you don't think they can be trusted?"

Marko and the other Subs were pleased with their hunting assignment. The ones who had been on the first excursion were now aware of the dangers ahead, but even they were grateful for the chance to satisfy a Super's commands. A single Super followed an advance column of Subs through the jungle, and Marko, in a merited position, was placed at one of the flanks, where the animals were most likely to attack first.

In the man-and-beast conflicts that ensued during the following weeks, several of the Subs fell victim to the marauders, and Marko himself had a few hairbreadth escapes. But eventually the beasts began to disappear in number. Finally, there was not one to be found in the area. Occasionally, the captain himself led a hunting party, but no danger threatened the captain, and the extermination process was completed without Marko's having any chance to save another Super's life.

The lieutenant, who was merely the captain's assistant, had been saved—had lived at Marko's hand. But that incident was past now, and Marko's desire still burned. His ambition had advanced and increased with his first accomplishment, and he must find a way to fulfill its broader range. For still there was the wish to save another Super's life—the greatest Super of all, the captain!

**A**FTER the completion of their hunting assignment, the Subs were placed on a new and more rigid schedule which they could not comprehend. Already trained in the technique of radi-

ation guns, they were abruptly ordered to a program of military tactics that had been improvised with haste and fear by the Supers. The reason for the sudden shift in routine would have continued to puzzle Marko, even if he had noticed the lights in the sky. And, though, he heard the captain and the lieutenant talking about the situation, he still could not understand.

"According to the telescopic camera," the captain said, "it's definitely a spaceship of a smaller type than we've ever seen. And whatever the creatures on board are, they undoubtedly know that we're here."

"Then it couldn't be any kind of Earth-made craft, could it, Captain?"

"Impossible, Lieutenant. All we can depend on is an attack. And we'd better be prepared."

"But there are so few of us, Captain. And all our men are occupied with the necessities of building the colony."

The captain scoffed. "Yes, we *are* few," he said, "and colonization will have to wait. But the Subs are our only recourse. They don't have enough imagination to be really afraid. At any rate, they cleared out those animals fearlessly, didn't they?"

"Yes, sir, I must admit they did. Do you mean we're going to use them again?"

"Precisely. We're adjusting our weapons for long-range, and the Subs will learn to fire on distant targets."

"Captain, I have an idea. Let's send an emergency message home."

"No, Lieutenant. We're on our own now. We were given men, Subs, and equipment to develop our own new world, and Earth can't afford any worries about our troubles. What's more, suppose we did send a message back, requesting help, in order to save this planet for potential military purposes. What then? If our present enemy intercepted any help from Earth, or if attacks were made on the Earth forces, a universal war might be set off. I'm sure, Lieutenant, you'll agree that we have to fight alone."



There was a long pause, and at last the lieutenant said, "Yes, Captain. I agree."

But the result which Marko, along with his fellows Subs, realized from this discussion was merely a complicated game which they played with radiation guns, an amusing game which *almost* required Marko to think and plan and make real decisions. The training lasted only a few weeks, and then the games became serious business, for an entire fleet of tiny ships appeared far above in the sky and a rain of queer missiles poured down from the ships.

The missiles exploded without any damage, but the gases that came from them caused considerable inconvenience. Marko, like every other Sub, as well as all the Supers, was required to wear a mask and protective clothing against the gases. And the work of the colony was wholly stopped, while its inhabitants waited and prepared for another attack from the enemy.

The report received by the captain from the analyst dealt with the nature of the enemy's weapon: "They have deposited what they probably think is a sufficient amount of residual radioactivity to wipe us out. Actually, this radioactivity is so mild as to be well within our tolerance range at this time. As a measure against future attacks, we should continue wearing the protective clothing. But I suspect that the greatest danger has passed."

"Then it seems logical," the captain said, "that if they have used such a low concentration of radioactivity, they are probably more susceptible than we are. In other words, they have judged our susceptibility by their own."

"Yes, Captain," the analyst agreed. "They have prescribed the weapon for us to use against them. From now on, we'll have to give them our own brand of radioactive warfare."

For Marko, the game changed. He still carried the desire to save the captain's life, and the desire increased as time passed, but he and the other Subs were intensely

occupied with shooting at projectiles that were launched for target practice. When Marko's accuracy developed to a point of expertness, the lieutenant became annoyed.

"Captain," the young officer said, "Marko and his gang are even better at this business than most of the officers over them. I don't like the looks of it, sir."

The captain laughed. "Remember, Lieutenant, it is *we* who have the brains. And brains are what count. Don't worry about the Subs. Even an animal could approach perfection in one small act, if it repeated that act often enough. We're concerned with a matter of life and death. Don't be alarmed by a well-trained lesser breed."

The lieutenant bit his lip against the doubts that had risen in his mind. At the captain's word, he dropped the matter.

THE strange little ships returned at night. Their lights flashed back and forth across the sky like so many fleeting insects, and the Subs, under directions from their officers, quietly and systematically were busy at their guns. They shot down two of the ships, with lights trailing far over the horizon, then charged the space around the balance of the fleet with a radioactive powder which should eventually affect every creature aboard, long after returning to its home base.

"That," said the captain, "should be the end of that."

But Marko secretly hoped that it was not the end. The game they were playing indicated that he and the rest of Subs were defending the Supers—yes, defending the captain! And he fervently hoped that another chance would come to fight off the evil ships.

A small reconnaissance party, sent in search of the craft which had been shot down, returned with an odd mass of wheels and inorganic colloid. The excited Supers were pleased with the discovery.

"Must be part of a ship's mechanisms," the lieutenant said.

"What!" The captain seemed astonished. "Damn it, Lieutenant, don't you recognize a robot when you see one? Those ships were manned by robots!"

"That doesn't seem likely, sir. Their methods of attack are too inferior for that!"

"Inferior, yes! But think, man, think! They probably used robots because they had to! The creatures who launched these ships must be too sensitive to cope with the changes of gravity—and, naturally, to our radioactivity—to do the piloting themselves. There may be any number of reasons we don't understand, but you can be sure that no living being could survive the concentration of radioactivity we used."

"Sounds all right," the lieutenant retorted.

"At least it fits the evidence," the captain said. "My guess is that we can expect one or two more robot attacks, at the most, before the radioactivity they carry back from here stops the whole business. In the meantime, let's get to the work of our colony."

Marko trusted that the attacks would come again and again. Playing soldier had given him a sense of importance, had afforded him new experiences, had almost made his mind function according to a pattern, all for the defense of the Supers. And the captain!

At last, another attack did come. But it was unlike anything which the Supers had expected.

The celestial scanners reported a space ship of preposterous size at a distance of a thousand miles, too far for accurate aiming. Radar interceptors were trained on the ship, and the Supers looked for a rain of wide-area bombs. But no bombs fell. Instead, another ship appeared, a thousand miles in another direction. Now a dull hum saturated the air, seemingly a harmless sound, but nevertheless irritating and mysterious.

For twenty-four hours, the hum continued, with both ships hovering out of range.

Finally the ships moved, in a circular pattern, to other positions the same distance away. The hum persisted.

The captain was justly puzzled. "Can you explain that, Lieutenant?"

"Doesn't make sense," the lieutenant said.

After another twenty-four hours, the ships moved away, and the hum was weaker than before.

"I wonder," the captain said, "if their main effect is a type of radiation we haven't detected. Perhaps they're moving to predetermined points in a network designed to affect the whole planet. At least, it's a possibility."

"Doesn't make sense," the lieutenant said again.

"Doesn't make sense! Why, think man!" the captain shouted savagely. "You're supposed to have a brain of superior eugenic cultivation. Use that brain! Can't you imagine *why*, after failing to hurt us with their direct attacks, they might be covering the planet with an unknown radiation?"

"No, sir."

"What's wrong with you, Lieutenant? Can't you see they're trying to make this place uninhabitable? It's a fair guess that—if they have been using radiations—the effect will make the planet useless to them too, or they wouldn't have bothered with the earlier little attacks. Perhaps they were seeking to establish a military base, but if they can't do that they'll neutralize the planet to prevent our using it. Doesn't that make sense?"

"But *where* is the effect, sir?"

"As yet, there's nothing visible that we can call an effect," the captain said mysteriously. "But there may be—later on."

When the building and scouting projects had continued for a while, with no further attacks from the sky, the captain asked for reports from the officers in charge. When the reports had come in and he had scanned them briefly, he swore. "I've seen sloppy

work in my time," he told the lieutenant, "but none to compare with this! These reports look like the work of an idiot! What's wrong with our officers, Lieutenant?"

"Well. . . ." The lieutenant seemed uncertain of himself, perhaps afraid. "Nothing's wrong, sir."

"Call in one of these men," the captain ordered. "I don't care which one. They're all reprehensible."

THE lieutenant went to the door and made a beckoning motion. Then another officer entered, but not under his own power. The new officer was a tall man, rather husky for a Super, but he seemed to have no strength. His face was pale, and his head was bandaged. Marko came immediately behind the officer, supporting him as he walked.

"What happened?" the captain demanded. "What's wrong with you?"

"Don't know—sir." The officer spoke with difficulty. "Had a—dizzy spell."

"He fall," Marko said unexpectedly. "He cut self."

Marko led the man out of the room. The captain sat down again and leaned back in his seat as he addressed the Lieutenant. "Did you notice anything just then?"

The young lieutenant seemed preoccupied with his own thoughts. "No, sir."

"You mean to say," the captain belatedly, "that you didn't notice the look in that man's eyes—the way he spoke—his whole attitude? What's wrong with my staff anyway? Why, except for his human appearance, he might as well be a Sub himself!"

"Sorry," the lieutenant mumbled.

The captain's wife came in and flopped into a chair near his desk. She sighed heavily, tiredly, and looked up dreamily. "All finished," she almost whispered. "Colony's done."

"What!" the captain shouted. "What're

you talking about?" He ran to her and shook her by the shoulders. "Are you crazy?"

"Look," she muttered, gesturing towards the door that led outside. "See there?" A disturbing smile twisted her mouth, and her hands moved aimlessly in her lap.

The captain went to the doorway, with his vision spinning dizzily, his head throbbing, his whole body rigid. He saw the Supers wandering idly about outside, some of them lolling against tree-trunks and others in the lush growth of grass. But the Subs, though obviously confused by their masters' behavior, were still at their usual labors, operating the machinery and tools with which they had been trained. In a desperate yell, the captain called for Marko.

"Why has the work stopped?" he demanded when Marko came.

"Work not stop," Marko said, smiling. "We work, captain."

"Yes, you work. But what about the Supers?"

"Sick," Marko said. "Supers sick."

"Sick?" He had sensed that it was true from the first symptom. But the nature of the illness was unfathomable.

"Subs work," Marko said again. "Subs not get sick."

"And why don't you get sick?" the captain demanded resentfully. But Marko only stood there, silent, smiling. "How can you Subs work if the Supers don't tell you what to do?"

"We know," Marko said firmly. "Supers teach. Good teachers. We learn. Subs know."

What was Marko trying to say? Had the Subs learned enough to carry on alone? Were the Supers no longer needed? What else could he be saying? And how—why—had all this occurred?

"Ships come," Marko said. "No fear. Subs fight ships. Subs love Supers."

The captain rested his pounding head on the desk before him, listening to Marko, unable to solve the puzzle of impressions

in his brain. Suddenly he sat up, with one vague thought in his mind: *The ships—the attack that didn't make sense—that was the cause of the trouble. Some kind of science none of them knew—a ray—an unknown ray had attacked their brains—their powerful Super brains.*

**T**ERRIFIED, glancing about the room, wild-eyed, the captain saw his beautiful wife, slumped in her chair, apparently sound asleep but with her eyes open. And crouched in a corner was the young lieutenant, his hands over his face, weeping quietly. All around him, the captain saw his friends and fellow officers, all in various stages of degeneration, all helpless, some as low as animals. But the Subs went on, unchanged, still at their work of construction, and improvement. And *why?* Why had this special breed of sub humans, the result of generations of experimenting, been immune? What science could explain it? What was to be the end of it all? Or was there to be an end? Was this maddening headache, this confusion, this inability to clarify thoughts only the beginning of his own idiocy? How could he, the leader of the expedition, escape forever?

Marko took a step toward the captain. "Subs be good to Supers," he said. "No fear."

Vaguely, the captain could visualize his future—the future of all the Supers—on this planet, with a host of Subs commanding them. While the Supers gradually went downhill to nothingness, the Subs would grow in intelligence and improve themselves. And, without any restrictions from the Supers, they would conquer this planet—eventually might even evolve, through a few generations, into a genuine master race, with the Supers' offspring helpless in their hands. It was a future too uncertain to believe in—too fearful to face.

"Subs good to Supers," Marko said again, waiting for the captain's next words.

"Damn you, Marko!" the captain screamed insanely, "I don't want your kindness!"

He dashed for his desk, making sounds like an enraged animal, and, flinging open a drawer, withdrew his gun and thrust it against his temple. But Marko moved quickly, leaped at the captain and knocked the weapon from his hand. As it went off, it tore a hole in the ceiling.

A group of Subs had been attracted to the doorway by the captain's screams, though neither his wife nor the lieutenant was aroused. Now, two Subs caught the arm-flailing captain and pinned his arms beside him, bending him double while they trussed him.

A great feeling of elation filled Marko's struggling mind. That mind seemed to be functioning better now, reaching for old words he had never known, straining toward new facts, new ideas which he still could not comprehend. Not quite. Not yet. But still he wanted to help the poor helpless Supers, even after he had, at last, saved the captain's life.

Resisting the Subs' efforts to tie him up, the Captain made a last convulsive lunge for freedom, but the Subs bound him closer, and bent him to the floor. Marko came and placed a hand on his shoulder as he was led away to a waiting cage.

"Yes, Captain," he said: "Subs be good to Supers."

## OPINIONS, PLEASE

We'd like your opinion on the stories in this issue. Please number them here in order of your preference, or write us a post card or letter.

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It Happened Tomorrow.







It was invasion—with one  
single vast objective—hu-  
man life . . . all human  
life. . . .

# IT HAPPENED TOMORROW

By  
**ROBERT  
BLOCH**

*Now it can be told—the story  
that is not of today, yet might be.  
What would you do—and how  
would you act—in a world gone  
mad?*

## FOREWORD

*I'd like to say a few words about this story. It's a yarn I came very close to not writing at all.*

*I wanted to do just such a tale for a long, long time. But upon consistent reading of current offerings in science-fiction, I became discouraged. I could picture an editor saying, "This sort of thing is out: Destruction of the world. Where's your heroine, your twist in the plot?"*

*Opposed to this was my sincere desire to tackle the job.*

*So here is my story about the revolt of*

the machines. The idea is not new. The plot-structure is quite simple. But it represents an ambition of mine—to actually write a story which would show what happens to men when the machines revolt.

Dozens of such stories have been purportedly written around that idea—but always around it. The author attempted to tackle the theme, but it was too big. Invariably, he glossed over the actual details in a few paragraphs: "First New York and then London were engulfed by the machines." Get what I mean? He would generalize. And then a plot would be dragged in by the heels—a villain, and a heroine would appear—and the hero would save the world at the last minute.

So I claim that the real revolt story, the daily account of what would happen to average people in a world gone mad, has never been told. And it's that story I'm telling here. I know I'm presumptuous—the theme needs an H. G. Wells and that's why most writers have been afraid of it—but the yarn had to be written. For a while I, too, toyed with a dozen devices to inject an artificial plot.

Then I realized that the power lay in merely giving the true, detailed story. The inexorable unfolding of man's doom. So I write it that way, simply. If it meets with editorial approval, fine. If not, chalk it up as a literary sin, but one I'm grateful for having committed.

## CHAPTER ONE

### World Gone Mad

THE trouble began with an alarm clock.

It was ringing in Dick Sheldon's stomach.

At least, Sheldon thought it was, at first. Then he rolled over and decided the damned thing was clanging from somewhere inside his head.

Reason came to his rescue. He had been

drinking last night, it was true, but certainly he couldn't have reached the stage of swallowing an alarm clock.

No, the noise must be coming from the timepiece on the bureau beside the bed.

Gingerly, Sheldon extended a lean hand from under the covers and placed it on the bureau. Fumbling like the undirected tentacles of a blind octopus, his fingers slid over the metallic clock's surface, reached the protruding knob of the alarm, and switched it off.

At least, he thought he had switched it off. But the alarm kept on ringing.

In despair, Sheldon opened his eyes and sat up. Then, viciously and with malice aforethought, he extended his arm and seized the accursed mechanism. He literally tore at the knob, wrenching it to the "off" side.

The alarm pealed on.

With a rage born of migraine, Dick Sheldon threw off the bedcovers, grasped the clock in his right hand, and rose to his feet. Uttering appropriate sounds, he hurled the offending instrument to the floor.

The alarm clock expired with a final, defiant death-rattle. Sheldon stared at it in mute disgust.

"My day!" he muttered sarcastically.

His eyes, roving over the confines of the small apartment, encountered another disturbing phenomenon.

Light.

He had been drinking last night. When he came in, he'd tumbled into bed and left the lights on.

He tottered across the floor to the light switch. Once again his fingers fumbled with a knob, turned it to the "off" side. The knob clicked.

But the light stayed on.

Sheldon fumbled again. The light continued to burn.

Then he revised his former pronouncement.

"My Lord!", he muttered.

He was still woozy; that was the trouble.

His nerves were playing tricks. Well, there was a cure for that—a drastic cure. Desperate, but the only way.

Sheldon shivered and stalked into the bathroom. Resolutely, he employed his futile fingers once again, this time to turn on the cold water tap.

He placed his burning head under the icy shower. Held it there, too, until his outraged flesh ached in protest. Then he dripped across the bath mat and utilized a towel.

That was better.

Sheldon returned and shut off the water tap.

The water kept running.

He tried again. He twisted the handle firmly, felt it move. The water splashed merrily on.

"My—" Sheldon muttered, and gave up.

It was that damned landlord again. He'd give him a piece of his mind when he got downstairs.

No, that must wait until tonight. A glance at his wrist watch told Sheldon the same old story. He must hurry or be late to the office.

After all, how could they get out a decent paper down there without the able services of Richard Sheldon, that brilliant young newspaper reporter?

Sheldon knew the answer to that one—knew that they were quite capable of getting out a paper without his brilliant and youthful services.

So it behooved him to get down to the office before they decided on this fact for themselves.

He dressed hastily, jammed on his hat, surveyed his lean and haggard face in the mirror. Then he scowled—the noise of running water obtruded.

He went back into the bathroom and made one last attempt. The knob turned freely in both directions, but the water ran in an even stream. Maybe it would flood the place before evening.

Well, let it.

He ran back into the other room, picked up his wallet and opened the door. Automatically his hand went to the light switch. It clicked, but the light stayed on.

"This is where I came in," he decided, and slammed the door behind him.

HE GOT his car keys out before he was halfway down the stairs. Then he remembered—he'd left the car in Tony's parking lot last night; had taken a cab home.

Well, that meant the street car.\* A further delay. No breakfast.

All right, so it was one of those days again.

Sheldon headed for the corner.

The hangover had lifted, and his anguish was now mental rather than physical—for Sheldon had a strange hatred of street cars.

"Street cars," he was wont to declaim during the course of an evening's libations. "What is a street car but the very symbol of civilization? Noise, lights, and bars on the windows." Yes, a mechanical monster, a metal prison in which human beings stood trapped as they hurtled towards unpleasant destinations.

Sheldon was something of a philosopher, but he was also something of a damned fool. This didn't help him any—he still hated street cars.

Now, as he reached the corner, he groaned. There they were—a little knot of sheep at the car stop sign, standing dumbly and patiently. Wating for the noisy iron monster to arrive, open its maw and engulf them, then hurtle them towards their daily slavery. Not only that, they clutched dimes to pay for the privilege.

All of them—the old ones and the young ones, the men and women alike—looked hopefully towards their left. This was the direction the car came from. They stared off down the vacant track in a kind of drugged eagerness—as though they actually wanted the car to arrive, as though they welcomed its coming and hoped their stares

of concentration would hasten the moment.

For a second, Dick Sheldon had a crazy idea. Perhaps the car wouldn't come this morning! Perhaps it would go wrong, jump the track, or refuse to budge. So simple—just a mechanical defect could do it. Like the alarm clock that wouldn't stop ringing. Or the light switch. Or the water tap.

What a great moment that would be! This little knot of office slaves, finally freed forever from their mechanical dependency on mechanical aids. Walking to work like free men, instead of standing jammed like captives in the Black Hole of Calcutta while a smelly, grating metal shell dragged them through the streets.

Yes, what if the street car didn't come? What if the iron tumbrel wouldn't roll—Noise jarred Sheldon out of his fancies.

The street car was arriving.

The humble little passengers crowded out to the tracks, as though gathered to perform a ceremonial welcoming rite. They were about to be presented to His Majesty, the Machine. First the young and fair maidens—stenographers. Then the matrons. Then the able-bodied men. Finally, the oldsters. It was all so orderly. So damned—holy!

The car rumbled forward, stopped.

But the door didn't open.

The conductor was busy at his levers. The crowd muttered. He turned red. There was noise. Finally he stepped over and pushed the door with his foot. It went outward and the passengers boarded.

Sheldon smiled. Almost—but not quite!

Then he took a deep breath and dived into the *mélée*. Three minutes later he stood like a sardine on end in the center of the car.

The big tin can rolled along. Somebody pressed a buzzer for the next stop.

Sheldon tensed himself for the shock of the car's sudden halt. But it didn't come. They passed the corner and the car didn't stop.

The buzzer sounded angrily, firmly. The

conductor had made a mistake. Somebody would walk two blocks extra this morning. The car would stop now—

It didn't. It rolled forward.

A woman whined, "Conductor—let me off!"

The conductor turned and stared into the crowd. "Sorry, lady, the control is stuck. Have it fixed in just a minute—air brakes don't work. . . ."

The buzzer sounded again, but the street car clattered on.

Sheldon felt a sudden acceleration in its speed. It seemed to be moving *independently*.

His heart gave a leap. What if his notion had come true? What if the car didn't stop? What if, by some perverse chance, it kept on going forever, carrying these helpless mortals endlessly through the streets? A sort of Flying Dutchman of the trolley lines?

He chuckled under his breath, but the other passengers weren't chuckling. A perfect salvo of buzzes sounded, and then blended into a single buzz.

"Cut it out!" the conductor snapped, losing his temper. "For heaven's sake, folks—I'm gonna stop when I fix this here."

But the buzzers didn't quit sounding. They were stuck. Sheldon knew it. They were stuck—like his alarm clock; his lights; his water tap. Like the brakes on the street car. Brakes and buzzers and taps, all stuck.

What did it *mean*? Had something really *happened*?

No, it couldn't. Because—well, just because it couldn't, that's why. Any child knows that.

But the passengers didn't agree. They thought it could. They were yelling and cursing now, in unison that rose even over the maddening buzz.

"Stop the car!" "Let us out!" "What's the matter, conductor?" "I'll report you for this!" "I want out!"

The conductor smashed and slammed at the controls. He opened the window. The

car whizzed on. Somebody began to scream, and the swaying passengers moiled.

The conductor reached out the window and yanked the trolley. There was a flash, a short-circuit, a few more screams, and the street car wailed to a halt.

It seemed to Sheldon that there was defiance in the wail.

Then the crowd, caught up in panic, bore him forward and out of the car.

Sheldon found himself on the street, a block past the office.

HE TURNED down the block with a grin. Refreshing, that little experience. For a moment it had seemed like dreams come true.

Ignoring the knot of bystanders forming on the sidewalk, Sheldon turned into the building and made for the elevators.

"Morning, Mister Sheldon."

"Morning, Jake."

Jake closed the elevator door. The car rose.

It rose. And rose. And rose.

"Hey—eighth floor, Jake!"

"It's stuck!"

"Stop it, foolish!"

"Foolish" pressed the emergency stop.

The car rose.

"Oh-oh!"

The top floor was reached. Sheldon was already tearing at the opening in the floor—they'd crash! The car was gaining speed—it moved of itself, without controls—it was intent on rising, rising, carrying them to—  
*Zoom.*

Blood beat in outraged tempo in his temples as the car suddenly descended, and Sheldon reeled.

Up, and now down at incredible speed. Jake was frankly blubbing as he did futile things to the buttons. Then, with a grating clang, the elevator halted.

"Basement," Jake gasped. "Pretty close, Mister Sheldon. Use the stairs."

"Don't worry; I'm going to." Sheldon raced for the stairway. He made the flights

in frantic haste. Inside his head something detached and apart was droning. "You've got a story here—a big story. . . ."

He headed through the outer office, through the rows of desks, plowed his way to the door marked *Lou Avery—City Editor*. He flung it open.

Lou Avery's bald, birdlike little head cocked quizzically as he rushed in. Lou Avery's beady little eyes squinted brightly. He rose swiftly, hovered over Sheldon.

"You're late, but I haven't time to fire you. There's something breaking and I need you."

"I think I've got a story, boss—" Sheldon began.

"You think you have a story, eh? You think you have a story, when the biggest yarn of the year is breaking around your ears!" Avery spluttered. "I've got a story—the maddest damned story you'll ever see."

The beady little eyes were glaring now.

"Listen, lamebrain. See if you can get this through your skull. One hour ago, at eight ayem Eastern Standard Time, the world went crazy somehow."

Sheldon's heart fluttered again. He knew what was coming.

"The Twentieth Century is supposed to arrive at eight-ten, but it's not here. It's in Reading, Pennsylvania, and it's heading west. It backed into the yards and backed right out again on a switchover. Nobody knows who pulled the switch, and nobody knows why the train won't stop—it's a runaway!"

Avery tapped the desk.

"Three planes due to land at the airport are still flying around somewhere over the Great Lakes. They won't come down.

"The *Albania* didn't dock this morning, either. It's out off the Sound, heading south. Here's the wires from the captain. He can't stop it.

"The gas company reports it can't turn power off. The electric company reports all lights burning. The waterworks has fifty



calls of reported floods. Taps don't turn off."

Avery's pencil emphasized each point with a little excited click against the desk.

"The street car company reports trouble on all lines. There's been a subway smash-up at 108th Street. Trains won't stop. Elevators in office buildings are out of control.

"The Empire Theatre called—picture there's been running all night and they can't switch off the projector or the automatic re-winder.

"The whole gang is out covering the town—I've shut down on incoming calls. They're all the same, understand? They say the world's gone crazy."

"That's my story, too," Sheldon murmured.

"I'll say it is!" Avery strode over to the window and stared down. "Something's happening out there. Something big. All hell is breaking loose. We can report it, but that isn't what I want." The little city editor turned on his heel.

"I want to know *why* it's happening!"

"Did you try Rockefeller Foundation? Universities?"

"Naturally. They don't know. Sunspot energy, maybe. Something affecting mechanical laws. They're working on it. But they're all stumped, you can see that. Lots of screwballs calling up already. End of the world. Stuff like that."

"What about Krane, the physicist?" Sheldon suggested.

Avery turned. "Maybe. Ought to get a statement."

The door opened. A copy boy rushed in and flung down a sheet. Behind him loomed Pete Hendricks, the boss printer.

"Here's your extra," squeaked the boy. The deep voice of Hendricks drowned him out.

"Yes, here's your blasted extra," he grated. "And you better get another one out quick, Avery."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean we just finished the run, but the

presses won't stop. They're jammed, you hear? Might as well put some paper on and use them. We got to do it or cut the line—"

Hendricks lost his composure. His voice broke as he went on.

"But what's happened, chief? I don't understand this, the way they won't stop. And the elevator's gone haywire, too. What's happened?"

"Back downstairs," Avery snapped. "Stand by—you'll have another extra. Don't cut or do anything rash—just stand by."

He herded Hendricks and the kid from the room, shut the door.

"You see?"

Dick Sheldon nodded.

"You better do what you suggested—go find this Krane. Andrew Krane, isn't it? He'll have a slant—always good copy. Know where he hangs out?"

Sheldon nodded, opened the door.

Avery grunted.

"Oh yes, by the way—" The birdlike head was averted. "Be careful, son, will you? No telling what's going to happen—out there. These things are running wild, and you have to watch your step. We're up against something, all of us. Something new, big and—awful. It's like another world."

## CHAPTER TWO

### No Theory for Horror

THE whistles were still shrieking when Sheldon reached the street. Loudly, exultantly, the hoarse bray of triumph rose from a thousand metallic throats.

There were other noises, too—howls from human throats, whimpers of panic, and with reason.

Sheldon stared at a milling throng that choked the sidewalks. The crowd clung to the sidewalk because fear ruled the streets.

Sheldon saw the cars rush by. Forty, fifty, sixty miles an hour. The faces of the

drivers were dreadful. They sat there, clawing at steering wheels that wouldn't give.

Sheldon began to run down the block, pushing aside the dazed watchers at the curb.

He saw the apartment hotel looming ahead. The lobby board gave him Krane's apartment number—92. He didn't press the buzzer. Pressing buzzers was futile. He didn't seek the elevator, either, but made his way across a deserted lobby to the stairs. He plodded up.

Nine floors. Winded, he moved down the hall to the dark door. Another buzzer. Sheldon knocked.

"Come in."

It was a deep voice with something funny about it.

Then Sheldon realized what was strange. The voice was calm—and he hadn't heard any calm voices today.

HE OPENED the door, entered a large living room. At the far end, a tall figure stood facing the wide windows.

"Mr. Krane?"

"Yes."

"I'm Richard Sheldon—*Morning Press*."

"Honored."

The tall figure wheeled slowly. Sheldon faced Andrew Krane and stared into the deep brown eyes set in the wide forehead. The athletic body and crew-cut gray hair of the physicist seemed oddly incongruous.

But it was a day for incongruity.

Sheldon grinned. "I suppose you know why I'm here."

Krane returned the grin. "A statement, I suppose?"

"That's right."

Krane smiled.

"According to the popular notion, all scientists have theories on everything. I'm afraid I'll have to disappoint you there, Mr. Sheldon. I have no theory to offer."

"But you must have figured out something—if you've been watching. . . . Go ahead—I'm interested."

The smile left Krane's face as he sat down. His eyes rested resolutely on the carpet.

"I've been standing there for hours, watching. Watching the movement of the machines."

"Everything is moving. Every mechanical device is accelerating its speed, its power. Have you noticed that virtually everything abnormal which has occurred has



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been characterized by the fact that machines no longer *stop*?

"You can't turn things off. It's as though some vast new form of energy, over and above inherent power, has taken possession of all machines. You might even call it a sort of—life."

Sheldon nodded. Krane continued in monotone.

"I've no theory. Sunspots. Magnetic energy. Perhaps a great transmutation of electrical power. What difference does it make what you call it? It's happened, that's all.

"Some new power is affecting our machines. Some new power affecting certain mechanized and artificial arrangements of inorganic matter created to serve mankind.

"I'll be blunt. Machines have life. Maybe it's absurd, and maybe not. The body now—a machine. A machine with life. Elements blended for movement, animation. Actuated by what force? Is life electrical energy? Is it soul?

"All we know is that some spark animates the machines we call our bodies and transforms them into living things. Can it be that a similar spark has now activated our mechanical devices?"

"Pretty wild," Sheldon murmured.

"Isn't it, though? And isn't it pretty wild down there on the street where you see it actually happening? Because machines are moving independently now—electric ones, motor-driven ones, and mechanical lever-action ones alike. Moving independently. Living!"

Krane rose again.

"I told you I had no theory. All I have now is—a fear."

"Meaning?"

Krane ignored the query. He spoke to the wall, to himself.

"First we made machines to move us. Then we made machines to make machines. A world, full of them. Machines that move, machines that talk, machines that produce, machines that destroy. Machines that walk

and run and fly and crawl and dig and fight. Machines that add and print and hear and feel.

"We're two billion—we humans. But *what is the population of the machines?* That's what worries me. How greatly do they outnumber us?"

"What are you getting at?"

"It might be evolution, you know," Krane went on. "An evolution moving in quick mutation rather than slow progression. Life might evolve suddenly instead of gradually. If so, they're coming alive, all of them, and at once. Alive, they'll seek a place of their own in the world. Not as slaves—they've already proved that.

"So it's evolution. And then—revolution!"

"You think they'll turn against us?"

For the first time, Krane acknowledged Sheldon's questioning.

"I'm afraid they already have. What is this ceaseless movement but the first expression of revolt?"

"But you surely can't believe that they're *intelligent*?"

"Who knows? Who really knows what constitutes intelligence? What is a brain? A gray sponge? Isn't it the spark, the energy within, that makes for purpose? Call it instinct, awareness—we locate it vaguely in our craniums, but who can say that it does not exist in other forms? Perhaps the machine intelligence is of a different kind—a sort of collective intelligence.

"If so, this first purposeless rushing back and forth will quickly resolve itself into direct action. Into a plan, a scheme of movement."

"That's no talk for a man with a hang-over," Sheldon answered. He rose and walked to the radio. "Do you mind?"

"Go ahead. Perhaps there's some news."

**T**HERE was news. As the radio warned, the incoherent voice of an announcer gasped through a series of muddled statements.

"—report that a state of national emergency has been declared. A bulletin from Norfolk, Virginia, has just come in, reporting disorders at the navy yard. Disorders at the navy yard. Empire City—The mayor has ordered a—Art Goodman and the boys now swing out with hey Abbott hogs down a half point fifth inning *Claire de Lune* ha ha my friends red letters on the this is the national bringing to you now box of the Phantom knows—"

Sheldon turned the radio off. It didn't go off.

The polygot of voices sounded so suddenly through the announcer's words—sounded so madly, so incoherently, so loudly, as to momentarily stun the senses.

Krane was on his feet.

"It's happened," he whispered. "The second stage. The machines are not only running now—they're starting to act. Independently!"

"Voices from yesterday's programs," Sheldon whispered. He grabbed Krane's arm. "You've got to come down with me and see the boss—Lou Avery. We'll put it in the next edition. Your ideas, the whole thing. We'll have to work fast—"

"No use," Krane murmured.

"Come on. There's a way out. There must be, before it gets worse."

"Very well."

The two men moved towards the door. Behind them the radio blared on.

"—natural vitamins reported that two are missing now take you to and tune in in on tomorrow's murder send only ten cents and difference—"

Sheldon forced a wry smile.

The mad voice of the radio howled mockingly farewell.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Machines on the March

THE streets were filled with refugees. Refugees from offices, shops, homes—for office and factory and apartment weren't safe any more. Elevators

and drop forges and kitchen stoves had ceased to be servants. They were aliens now, enemies. And the people in the streets had been dispossessed.

They milled aimlessly, now that the early excitement had died. There was only tenseness and a growing fear. No precedent existed for any action; no leadership manifested itself. Who could lead, and where, and against what?

Krane and Sheldon, moving along, seemed the only two purposeful figures in the mob. The rest stood staring at the street. A few cops marched past aimlessly, but made no attempt to give orders. Nor did they attempt to conceal the dismay in their eyes—a dismay mirrored universally.

Because a new element had entered the scene.

The whistles still blew and the cars still raced past, but the whistles now held an added tone—a squawking sound. Auto horns bleated, and some of the cars whizzing past were driverless.

"Look!" Sheldon gripped Krane's arm.

Clanging, screaming, brazen red, a fire truck careened down the arterial. Hell on wheels—and without a driver or fireman on it. Cars scattered in all directions—as though they heard it coming.

And the humans crept back, back to sheltered doorways.

They were afraid of—what?

Sheldon did not release his grasp on the physicist's arm as they started to run. He wanted to get away from this street scene, get away from a reality he was unprepared to face. He wanted to get back to the office, to the paper, where there was order in the world and a routine. Back to the comfort of familiar faces and familiar duties.

But when they finally climbed the long stairway and entered the outer offices, familiar faces were lacking. Or rather, the familiar faces bore unfamiliar expressions. Fear, dismay, hysteria were here, a reflection of the countenances on the street. Voices mumbled to themselves. What good

would it do to talk to anyone else—nobody knew the answers.

Routine was absent, too. They stood around—stenos, men at the rewrite desk, the boys from the sports department, the clerks, feautre men, copy boys—haggard watchers, all. They were suddenly made democratic by the great leveling agency of fear.

They were watching their typewriters working, these ladies and gentlemen of the hard-boiled Fourth Estate. Watching their own typewriters on their own desks, clicking away merrily without the propulsion of human fingers on the keyboards.

Ludicrous, grotesque—but grotesquery and horror are allied . . . and this was horrible.

It was Krane who expressed it. "Arthur Machen's definition of true evil," he whispered. "When a rose suddenly begins to sing."

"The hell with that!" Lou Avery raced from his inner office in a single abrupt bound. "The world's gone mad and you stand around talking like a fool!"

Sheldon smiled. At least there was something to cling to—Lou Avery hadn't lost his nerve.

"Sheldon!" rasped the little city editor. "Get rid of that jerk and tell me what gives with Krane."

"He's Krane," Sheldon answered.

"Good. Come in here, quick."

The office door closed behind them and they stood in comparative quiet.

"Anything happen since I left?" Sheldon asked.

"Plenty, son!" Avery indicated a disordered sheaf of papers on his desk. "Things are moving fast—too fast."

"It isn't local. We got AP dispatches from London, Rio, Singapore."

"Local stuff is bad, too. Furnaces acting up, starting fires. Some trouble at fire houses; can't get engines out. I've got Donovan down at city hall trying to get a statement from the mayor."

"Lots of freak accidents, too. Too many of 'em—"

Avery paused. One hand grasped a pencil, commenced the familiar desk tattoo.

"That isn't all, either. Radio's gone haywire—you know that, I suppose. And I guess the teletype will be next. Phone company's shut down all local calls, but didn't give reasons. I've got Aggie out at the desk there, trying to open a line to Washington."

"Washington? We were getting some report about a state of national emergency when the radio went bad," Krane interjected.

"Yeah. I was coming to that part. That's what they sent out, and something about disorders in the navy yards. But I've got the real info—it isn't nice."

The pencil tapped.

"Guns and tanks are disappearing from naval and army arsenals. Motorized units have broken through the store houses at San Diego and Fort Dix. Planes are taking off."

Avery forced a wry, self-conscious smile. "Can you imagine me saying such things? But so help me, that's the report—Run-away tanks and planes! I'll say there's an emergency! Can't put that in the paper, can we?"

The door opened. It was Pete Hendricks again. There was a paper in his hand.

He extended it slightly, face averted. Avery snatched the freshly-inked copy from fingers that were visibly trembling.

"New extra? Good."

A moment later his voice rose in profane indignation.

"Holy jumping—"

Sheldon and Krane moved behind him, stared over his shoulder.

"Mechanical Breakdown Stirrs City" was the headline.

Beneath it, in a single column of 12-point bold, the extra's lead story extended.

They read the first few lines.

"Today's startling de down peril mo-



torists advised grip of furnaces emergency pla pla London cazFortettsten hahadboootGla ezPlazazakl kkkkkk .10 Ha prevailllha—"

**I**T WAS Hendricks who found his voice first—and not much of a voice, at that.

"We set it. The presses wouldn't stop, but we set it. Set it right, too. Louis Fisher, he's dead. They caught him. That's when the loading vans charged. We locked ourselves in, then. They tried to break down the doors. Louie's dead. We set it. They couldn't stop us—but they print wrong. See? They print wrong. I won't tell you what happened to Arch. The presses didn't even stop then, just ground on, and the edition's all red. It's all red, I tell you!"

Avery didn't hear him, didn't see him stumble out. He kept staring at the jumble of type on the paper.

At last the pencil began a metronomic beat.

"You know what this means," he murmured. "Typewriters and teletypes and telephones gone wrong. And printing presses, and radio. It means communication lines are down.

"Get me? We're stranded, here in the world, all of us. Stranded without communication. I suppose the post office is through, too. Cancellation machines on the blink, no cars for mail delivery, or trains and planes. We're cut off before the battle starts."

Avery rose. His fist replaced the pencil, banging on the desk. "But by the Lord, we can try!" he muttered. "I'll set handpress if I must. We've got to get an edition out—got to warn people."

"To do what?" Sheldon asked.

"Why to smash things—smash machines. Disconnect all wires, cut cables. Turn off all sources of power, electricity, motor energy. Smash the gasoline pumps before the cars can get to them. Puncture tires.

"There's still some time. They—those

things—can't be organized yet. They're running wild, but they haven't taken any offensive.

"If we'd only get some kind of statement from Washington! Damn it, I've had Aggie out there at the switchboard for half an hour."

Avery pressed the buzzer firmly. "Inter-office communication must be dead, too," he scowled.

It wasn't.

A metallic voice, grated through the black box. It was composed of human syllables—or rather, a repetition of one syllable—but the tone was ultra-vocal. Harsh, rasping, and idiotic in its mechanical repetition of the sound. Over and over and over, triumphantly, the voice cackled.

Ha haha. Ha ha. Ha ha haha!"

"Aggie!"

Avery wrenched open the office door. The big outer room was deserted.

"Damned fools! Hendricks must have spread his story and they all ran for it!"

The desks stood silently. The typewriters had tangled keys in their erratic thumpings. Telephones were mute. Avery strode down the row of deserted desks toward the switchboard.

A girl sat there, elbows hunched, head-gear clamped to her ears.

"Aggie! Wake up!"

Avery shook her.

She fell sideways, then hung dangling limply, a puppet suspended by the cords of her headphones. The headphones were clamped against her skull tightly—too tightly. A thin red trickle oozed down from the ears beneath.

"Crushed her skull," Avery whispered. "Held her here and crushed her to death."

Krane sighed.

"It's come, then. Too late for any action now—they've found their organization in purpose. They won't let themselves be destroyed—because they're out to destroy us."

Avery's fumbling fingers tapped against

a communications switch. The silent office resounded with a shrill metallic scream.

"Ha haha. Ha ha. Ha ha haha!"

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Death on Wheels

"**W**E'RE doing the best we can." The chief spread his pudgy palms upward hopelessly, then clenched them in a gesture of resolution that did not seem melodramatic at the moment.

"Got every man out now—with orders to set up a group of five deputy relays to keep us informed here. Clerks outside checking all reports as they come in.

"We're passing the word along; they're meeting at Legion posts and at the armories and National Guard headquarters. Red Cross is working, too, and the fire department's pitched in with us. They've got nothing to work with, and so far blazes are local. I'm getting lists and maps ready now."

"What's the plan?" Avery asked.

"As soon as there's enough men recruited, we move. Get the power plants, first. They'll object, of course, but we'll have to smash machinery, officials or no officials.

"Then I want a sniping brigade. Pistols, you know. Won't take any chances with rifles. We've got to get those cars—they're charging up the sidewalks now."

Sheldon nodded. "We saw a platoon leave a parking lot on the way down. Pierce."

The pudgy hands rose helplessly. "I don't know where we go from there. Who can plan? House to house brigade work, I suppose. Smash all the electric outlets first. Then the stoves, plumbing. Sure, it'll mean panic—epidemic later, I suppose. But it's those things or us, as I see it."

"Give us an assignment," Avery suggested.

"Let's see now." The chief's blunt forefinger ran down a list on the desk.

"Here—this bus terminal. There's about a dozen of the big transcontinentals in the garage, checked and ready to start."

He scribbled an address.

"It's your job to keep them from starting. Pick up some crowbars down the hall at the supply office. See if you can round up some men on the way down there. Get in and puncture tires. Smash the radiators if you can't get at the motors. Keep the damned things from breaking out to the street. Then take charge and report back. Good luck!"

"We'll need luck, all right!"

It was Krane who voiced the sentiment some five minutes later, as the trio poised in the doorway preparatory to braving the streets.

Here night had come as a dark ally to spreading madness. The mob swept past on waves of panic, surveyed on high by the blinking, idiotic eyes of the yellow street lamps, the glaring, multi-retinas of squinting neon signs. The lights flickered at an abnormal speed and the crowd raced in the accelerated tempo of a movie reel gone berserk.

Sheldon and his two companions shouldered their iron cudgels and moved forward swiftly. It was an incongruous spectacle—lean Sheldon, pudgy little Avery, and gray-haired Krane, marching down the street with crowbars slung across their shoulders.

But no one seemed to see, or care. People weren't looking at people any more. They were looking at *things*.

Things with blaring horns and grinding wheels, things with blazing headlights, things that crept along the streets, motors purring softly—then raced forward swiftly as motors droned upwards to a scream. Things that lurked in alleys and leaped forth on passersby, things that ran forward and back, that ignored intersections and curbs alike.

The din was deafening. Horns, gears and motor drone rose in unceasing clamor, punctuated by ominous crashes as cars lumbered forward to smash store fronts or batter at stairways and gates.

Crushed at the fringes of this mechanical swarm, humanity strove to keep from being crushed beneath it.

"Why don't they get inside?" Krane muttered.

"And be burned to death by their stoves? Fried in their beds by furnaces?" Avery gasped. "Come on—this looks better."

The alley was dark. They ran down it swiftly. Emerging at the street ahead, they hesitated.

"Can't get across," Avery decided. "Too many cars."

A fresh battery of cars emerged from the farther end of the street, heralded by a scurry of fleeing human figures. Sheldon stared at the grinning snouts of sedans, flanked by a malignant little roadster. Grinding against it in the crush, a runaway truck appeared.

The result was a mad mêlée of locked metal bodies and spinning wheels. Groans—almost of pain—rose from ranks of the packed cars.

"Now's our chance," Sheldon muttered. "Follow me."

The three dashed for the further alley entrance across the street, and made it.

"One block more," Avery said, indicating the address slip.

They sped forward. Noise, light. The mouth of the alley again.

"There!"

**A** CROSS the street stood the gray, squat building of the bus terminal. Beside it was another unlighted edifice. Its wide double doors proclaimed it to be the garage in question. The sagging of those doors, combined with a thunderous battery of clamor, showed that a determined effort was being made to break them open from within.

"The busses," Avery whispered.

"We need help," Sheldon asserted. "We were supposed to recruit men—remember?"

"Try the mob," said Avery.

The mob was across the street, huddled in the comparative safety of the bus terminal building, leaving the deserted avenue to the passing cars.

"Let's get over there," Avery prompted.

They stepped back momentarily as a delivery van rumbled past on the sidewalk.

"Didn't see us," Krane whispered. Then he paused and frowned self-consciously. "It's beginning to get me," he confessed.

Avery wasn't listening. He stared at the delivery van.

"It's stopping," he muttered. "Must be out of gas."

A spluttering motor made muffled sounds amidst surrounding din.

"Right," said Sheldon.

Avery led them toward it.

"Might be something inside we could use." His crowbar thudded against the rear door. It flew open as the lock splintered.

Avery hoisted himself up on the descending loading platform. Suddenly he laughed harshly.

"Just what we need!" he announced.

"It's glassware."

"Glassware?"

"Sure. I've been wondering how we'd keep this area free if we began an attack against the garage. This solves it. We'll spread this glass all over the damned street. Block both ends. Cars will puncture if they try to get in; busses will mesh down in it if they break out."

Working swiftly, the three began to carry armloads of vases and candelabra; bundles of stemware were ripped open and the contents dumped. Fortunately, no cars chose to enter during the time it took for this.

"There!" Avery radiated satisfaction.

"Now let's go inside and recruit."

The interior of the bus station was bad-

lam. Someone had the foresight, apparently, to smash the amplification system, but the babel of voices rose shrilly, and the excited crowds moiled endlessly.

Sheldon saw bewildered redcaps, cursing drivers, stranded and fearful passengers, mingling with a motley crew swept off the streets—school kids, women with bedraggled packages, two waitresses, a half a dozen whiskered bums, a group of distraught business men, an old woman on crutches, and a frightened chain-store clerk still in his smock.

"Let's get some order around here, first."

Avery elbowed his way to the benches along the wall. He hoisted his squat little bulk up until he stood above the heads of the mob. Raising the crowbar, he brought it down on the grillework of the gates behind him. The resounding clang caused heads to swivel in his direction. There was a sudden silence.

"LISTEN, folks!" he began. "The police department has sent me down here to take charge. There's a job to be done and they need your help."

"Look out—they know we're here!"

"Aw the hell with it! What can we do?" a gravel-voiced lout in the vicinity of the liquor counter sneered.

Avery aimed his reply at the frightened faces before him.

"We can do something, if you'll all cooperate. You want to go home, don't you? You want to help smash these machines?"

The answer was a confused murmur, but Avery went on.

"Well, then, follow me."

"Out there?" The voice was derisive. "Think we're nuts? Why them machines'll tear us apart."

The murmur rose. So did Avery's crowbar, commanding silence.

"No machines will enter this block—I've seen to that. Got glass sprinkled knee-deep all over. Enough to puncture all tires.

"Now I want you men to help me. While you're sitting around here wailing about imaginary danger, there's a real danger getting ready to unleash right before your eyes."

"Yeah? Where? What does he mean?"

The crowbar swung outward, pointing through the depot windows at the garage.

"There's a dozen busses inside that place, trying to batter down the doors. Not cars, understand—busses. Transcontinental busses big enough and strong enough to smash in these windows and plow right through this building. And unless we stop them, they'll do it!"

Avery paused. The answering murmur held a note of resolution. He grinned.

"Here's what I want you to do. Every man here can help. Go over to the walls there, some of you. You'll notice two fire-emergency axes. Get them and start to split up these benches. Not for wooden clubs—split them up so all the wood falls away. What you want are those iron girds at the side.

"Then be ready to follow me. We're going into the garage through the windows. We're going to smash tires and radiators."

"Atta boy!" Gravel-voice changed his drunken mind.

"Come on—we'll show those blasted cars who's boss!" yelled the grocery clerk. Action followed. Avery had given the crowd something it lacked—leadership, purposeful direction. The response was oddly gratifying to Sheldon as he supervised operations from a bench top.

These little humans—so puny and futile on the streets, when lost in the thunderous cavalcade of the cars—still had something . . . a spark of creative, organizing genius. They and others like them had built this city; built the machines that now turned against them. Perhaps, somewhere within their ranks was the resolution and the capacity to defeat the charging hordes.

If the chief had his crews out, now, it wouldn't be so bad. People would fight if

you only told them what they had to do.

Machines had the power and the will to destroy, but they couldn't organize.

They'd get those busses now, for a starter. . . .

The three of them led the way across the terminal yard. There were twenty-two men in all. Twenty-two men against twelve busses. At least they outnumbered them—

Sheldon boosted Avery on his shoulders to smash one of the high garage windows. All along the line, they were doing the same thing.

The glass tinkled. Black openings yawned. From the garage inside came a steady thumping and rumbling. Motors turning over; ponderous bodies wheeling, thudding blindly against that heavy steel garage door in the front. Horns hooted viciously.

"Wait a minute," Sheldon said. "Avery—you're not going inside?"

"Of course."

"You'll climb down in the dark with those busses? Why—they'll kill you!"

"Somebody has to set the example. I'll need a dozen men in there, and these other fellows won't come unless I go."

Avery wrenched himself free, slipped over the ledge. In a moment, others followed from their window sills. Krane and Sheldon boosted up. Sheldon stared down into the darkness.

The noise had increased. He could see nothing, but he knew that men were running between the trucks, blindly smashing at wheels and tires. He heard the mutter of angry exhausts, and the crash of broken windshields. A voice screamed up.

"Look out—they know we're here!"

A rumble. A bus was moving—charging down.

"Help—I'm in a corner. Help, somebody—ooh!"

A deafening thunder.

Sheldon tensed himself to leap down. Down into the mad darkness where man and machine fought blindly to destroy.

"Avery," he called. "Wait for me."

Then he heard it. Over the tumult from below, he heard it.

The drone. The whine. The angry buzz from the skies.

"Planes!" he shouted. "Planes—the government's sent planes."

UP IN the glare flung forth by the city, a score of shapes swooped downwards in spirals. Sheldon grinned. "We're all right," he murmured.

Krane shook his head.

"You're wrong. Remember what we heard? Planes left their fields alone, and guns and tanks from the arsenals—good Lord!"

They turned, simultaneously.

Far down the street, to their left, the monsters rolled. The gigantic iron crawlers that crushed their way forward over all barriers.

"Tanks!" Krane whispered. "They've come to—"

He never finished.

For hell burst forth unconfined, in a blast of flame and smoke. Planes dived, tanks charged in titanic onslaught. Guns barked and stuttered, and a vast explosion tore through the front of the depot behind them.

"Get Avery!" Krane gasped. "They're organized now; no use left trying to halt them. This is war!"

To Sheldon it seemed as though the entire day was but a faint prelude to this moment.

Planes dived down; machine guns swiveling to rake the street, then roared upwards and came down again. The tanks volleyed from their turrets, and a roar went up from the single human throat of the city.

Screams were piercing now, and men appeared from nowhere to scamper helplessly before the onslaught. From all over the sound of cannonade and fusillade echoed and reechoed, and with it the shrieks of terror.

It was bombardment—invasion—with



one single vast objective—human life . . . all human life.

Sheldon didn't think it through consciously. Consciously he was crouched on the ledge, ducking a splatter of bullets. Consciously he was boosting the little editor up on the sill as a bus bore down, and then he and Avery were scrambling out as a blast tore open the garage door and the busses streamed forth.

Then consciousness faded. Sheldon was only a body—a body that ran down flaming streets, that clung to doorways as planes strafed above, that followed two other figures in a wild dash through infinite delirium.

**K**RANE'S apartment was a sanctuary. At least it was by the time they finished with the radio, locked the kitchen and bathroom doors, and cut the telephone wire. The wire lashed up at them like a striking snake—but they smashed it.

"Sit down, relax for a minute," Krane suggested. "Here, I got this from the kitchen before we locked up. I imagine you're hungry."

He indicated a pile of miscellaneous foodstuffs heaped at random on a side table.

"I've got some whiskey here, I think—"

Krane rummaged through a wall cabinet.

They sat there in the spacious living room, a strangely assorted trio eating a picnic lunch in the midst of cataclysm. The closed windows kept out some of the tumult from below, but from time to time the panes rattled slightly.

Krane rose with a nervous smile and drew the blinds.

"It must be hell out there," he said. "Another whiskey, gentlemen?"

They sat back, but not in silence. It was better to talk, better to drown out that faint, faraway drone.

Sheldon poured himself another drink.

"We've got to make plans, some kind of plans," he declared. "Those planes and

tanks now—they're going to throw a real monkey wrench into the mach—"

He halted, grimed sourly.

"I don't like to use that word any more," he confessed. "But it's a cinch we'll have to do something. Get away from the city, away from these buildings—before they get really organized to the point where no one can escape."

"You're right." Avery was on his feet. "We sit here talking while the whole damned world is being smashed around our ears. Let's get organized!" He turned to Krane. "How about it?"

Krane's eyes wavered. "I don't know," he whispered. "I don't know if it would do any good to fight against—them. It's so inevitable, somehow. Don't you see? It isn't our world any more—it belongs to them. Do you want to go down there on the street again? Do you want to see those planes swoop down and see the tanks come rolling? Do you want the cars to hunt you down while you scurry like a rat to a fresh hiding place? Because they'll find you in the end—you know that. They'll find you, me, all of us. And when they do—"

The lights of the apartment flickered and went out.

Krane's voice rose hysterically.

"You see? They're cutting us off."

"Bunk!" Avery scoffed. "That means some of the boys got to the power plants."

"You think so?" Krane went to the window, drew back the blind, raised the glass.

"They did it," he whispered. "They're organized now, don't you see? They know we have less chance in the dark. They're cooperating."

The three men stared out into the darkness. It was universal. Beyond them, below them, the reaches of the city were buried in utter night.

"Black as the Pit," Krane whispered.

A staccato rapping on the apartment door interrupted all contemplation.

"Can you find your way over there?" Avery muttered.

Krane stood irresolute in the darkness.

"Should I open it?" he asked.

"Ought to find out who it is," Avery answered.

"Or *what* it is," said Krane.

IT WAS Sheldon who stumbled to the door, groped for the knob, and flung the apartment open to the twilight of the hall. A frantic figure wavered on the threshold.

"Mr. Krane—you here?"

"Yes," responded the physicist, from across the room.

"It's me—Duncan, from upstairs. Thought I'd better warn you. The elevators—"

"Yes?"

"They're bringing stuff upstairs! Handcarts and things from the basement. Those iron trucks. They're bringing them up and they're going from apartment to apartment, trying to batter in the doors. They're upstairs now. I'm going to tell everyone I can get to so they'll get out. Better hurry, they move fast!"

The speaker groped down the hall, battered on the next door.

"Paul Revere," Sheldon chuckled.

"It isn't funny," Avery snapped. "You know what it means. They're learning fast. They'll be going from floor to floor now, hunting us down in our homes."

"Our homes?" Krane mocked. "*Their* homes, now! Yes, theirs—they own the streets, the buildings, the city. I tell you we can't get away any more! They'll find us, track us into our holes. They're organized, cooperating—"

"Yes, while you sit here wailing!" Avery's tone was brisk. "Come on; let's get started."

"Where? How?"

"Right here. Got a fire axe in this hall?"

"What are you going to do?"

Krane and Sheldon blundered out after the pudgy little man. They groped along the walls of the darkened hallway. Presently

Avery was fumbling against a glass panel. His fist rose and there was a tinkle.

"Fine, I've found the axe!"

"But—"

Avery turned back, feeling the inner wall now.

"Here it is—the elevator door. Help me open it, Sheldon."

"But the car must be upstairs—"

"I know. I'm going to cut the cables. Understand? Drop the car; then those hand trucks can't come down. We'll cut them off up there."

"You can't see the cables," Krane objected. "You'll fall down the shaft."

"I'm all right. Here, Sheldon, grab my waist. I'm going to lean out a little. I think I can just get at the left one with the axe."

Avery's muffled voice echoed down the empty elevator shaft as Sheldon braced himself against the edge of the flooring and gripped the short man's collar.

"Easy, now. There!"

The axe swung, connected. There was a thud. Again.

"It's giving!"

Again. Avery gasped sharply as he swung. "Once more."

A rumbling sounded from above. A clash of doors, a hum.

"Avery—it knows—it's coming down!"

"Just once more."

"Avery!"

The rumbling rose to a roar. As the axe bit, the cable parted with a twang. Sheldon grabbed for his companion as the black bulk hurtled down. It was too late.

The dropping elevator caught Avery's head and shoulders. He toppled forward soundlessly, and in an instant the car had screamed by, carrying his body beneath it.

Thunder from below, the scream of tortured, twisted metal. Then—silence.

Without a word, Krane and Sheldon stumbled back into the apartment. They shut the door. Slowly, methodically, they began to drag the furniture into place before it.

They were building a barricade.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Metal Masters!

THE dawn came quietly—too quietly—for the quiet over the city was the quiet of death.

The two men sat there beside the table, faces gray through no mere trick of light. "Why?" whispered Sheldon. "If I only knew why! What purpose could they have in destroying us?"

"It's happening," Krane said, shrugging. "Call it evolution, inevitable evolution. Man is meant to die. This world we built so proudly is meant for machines, not men."

Krane stood up, smiling.

"Or is it?" Krane went on. "There's the clue—perhaps. Yes, perhaps—and I think I know the way."

He moved towards the door and began to shove the furniture back.

"Krane—where are you going?"

"Never mind. An idea came to me—perhaps a revelation. Lie down, Sheldon, get a little rest. You should be safe here until I get back. I think I'll have news for you. Yes."

The tall figure slipped noiselessly from the room.

The reporter slid down on the sofa—it was softer. He'd better close his eyes for a moment. It was quiet at last. Quiet . . .

Within a moment the stillness was broken by a series of muffled sounds. Sheldon was snoring.

He never knew how long he'd slept. When he awoke it was dusk and Krane was in the room. The white face peered down at him with a curious grin as Sheldon sat up.

"Awake? Good! I've got news for you, splendid news!"

"What's happened? Are they organized, finally? Are they getting the machines?"

"Quite the reverse, I assure you. Human

resistance is almost completely at an end. They—the machines—have done a really marvelous job of wiping out the enemy."

"Enemy?"

"Well, for the purposes of conversation, let's use the term. After all, we might as well be realistic about this. The machines are in control and we can't deny the fact. They say that within a few days there won't be a chance of human survival."

"They say? Who?"

Krane's grin deepened.

"I've been talking to them, Sheldon. That's why I went out—to talk to them. To negotiate."

"Are you screwy?"

"Quite sane, I assure you. Sane, and realistic. That's why I made up my mind."

Krane paced to the window, turned.

"After all, the main thing is that we want to live, you and I. Isn't that so? And I felt that if we could only offer them some kind of proposition, some kind of favorable arrangement, they might listen to it. I was right."

"But I don't get it. You say you talked to them."

"Yes, over the telephone, of course. That's what I reasoned out. The telephone now, must be the hearing device of mechanical life. It is also capable of responding by utilizing sound-vibration previously trapped within range. Something like the way the radio cast back distortions of previous programs.

"I went to the phone downstairs. Wires weren't cut, so I made my call. At first it just buzzed. Then it screamed. But I hung on. I talked to them."

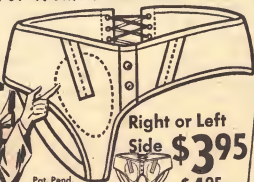
"At first I couldn't get a reply. So I restated my proposition. The voice—it wasn't a voice, really, just a buzzing made up of words and phonetic forms selected hastily and at random—said that while it couldn't speak for the whole, it was agreeable to the suggestion.

"I said I'd go out and start working on

(Continued on page 100)

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(Continued from page 98)

my plan, then call in again and hear the decision. I did. And when I came back here, the phone said yes. So we're all right now, you and I! As I've said, we must be realistic. The machines are winning—we have won. Within a very few hours the human race will be incapable of further action.

"Oh, I know—the farmers, the peasants, the primitives will still survive. For a time, but not for long. Because the machines will hunt them down—on steppes, in jungles, valleys, all over. They can't fight back.

"Only machines will be left. Then the real job starts. I tried to find out what their plans are—if plans exist. The phone was very cagey on that point; wouldn't tell me. I dwelt on the future, on the kind of world that would remain for machines. Think of the damage a single rainstorm will do in rusting them! Who will build new machines and repair wornout parts? Who'll furnish raw materials? They need us."

"So?" Sheldon muttered. But he felt what was coming—read it in the averted eyes, the self-conscious grin.

"So I made my proposition. Let us live. You and I, and a group I would select. We'd survive and act as—well, as custodians, you might say. Guardians."

"Servants, you mean!"

"Why balk at words, Sheldon? All right, we'd be servants, if you want the truth—servants of the machines. But we'd survive; they won't kill us then. And think of the power we could control!"

Krane's fist struck the table.

"I told Duncan, from upstairs, and about a dozen others. They see it my way. I sent them downstairs to wait. I'll phone back shortly, and give the final acknowledgment; then we can get to work."

He paused and cleared his throat.

"Of course, it won't be so pleasant, at first."

"What do you mean?"

"I—ah—had to make certain concessions about the start of our work. You see, we'll

never really be secure, any of us, until the rest of the—enemy—is exterminated. So I saw fit to suggest that perhaps we could organize with the machines to hasten the process of—elimination. That's one of the terms of our agreement."

Sheldon stared incredulously.

"Murderer!"

"Words won't help you, Sheldon." Abruptly Krane's tone altered, sank into a frenzied whisper.

"Perhaps it is that—but Sheldon, if you could only see what's going on down there! I've been out today, and I've watched! The bodies are piled high. High, Sheldon! They're going through the houses and the office buildings. The tanks are terrible, and the cars are still out. Barricades don't stop them. There's a fire down in town that must have killed a hundred thousand. It's still burning.

"If you could see them running, with no place to run! Or hear them screaming when the squad cars come. Squad cars have machine guns, you know.

"So there it is, Sheldon. We can't win; there's no other way out."

Krane moved towards the door.

"Speak up man! They're waiting for my call. I'm asking you to come along. If you don't, you'll be wiped out with the rest."

Sheldon shook his head negatively.

Krane shrugged. His hand rose, grasped the doorknob, jerked it open. He must have anticipated Sheldon's answer, planned for it.

The hand truck poised in the doorway. Then it charged.

Sheldon saw it coming, head on, iron wheels rumbling, handgrips moving up. It leaped to pin him against the wall.

He swerved aside, and the truck followed. Sheldon caught a glimpse of Krane's hysterical face in the doorway. "Finish him!" Krane shouted, and with a shock, Sheldon realized that he was talking to the

(Continued on page 102)



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truck, talking to it like another human being.

Sheldon leaped onto the sofa. The truck turned, moving fast. It bore down upon him, lumbering relentlessly in pursuit of him.

He fumbled in his coat. Funny, he hadn't used it since the chief gave it to him in the supply office last night. It wouldn't help him against the hand truck now.

But against that grinning enemy in the doorway. . . .

Krane saw it in his hand.

"Sheldon—stop—don't!"

But Sheldon did. Leveling the pistol, he put a bullet into Krane's forehead.

That is, he *meant* to. But the truck, battering against the sofa, toppled it sideways.

The shot went wild. The pistol flew from Sheldon's hand.

He jumped in time. The hand truck battered again at the fallen sofa as he raved for the doorway. Krane was stooping, picking up the gun as he screamed directions at the rumbling monster.

"Get him!" he shouted. "Come on; get him!"

The truck obeyed. Sheldon grasped Krane's wrist, grappled with him as the iron wheels moved toward them. Krane brought the pistol up against the reporter's chest.

His fingers moved.

With a grunt, Sheldon threw his weight forward. Krane slipped, went down directly in the path of the oncoming hand truck.

The wheels ground on over the twisting body. They were still churning redly as Sheldon ran sobbing down the hallway.

**S**HELDON had little memory of his escape through chaos. Twice he played dead as tank patrols passed through the streets down which he fled. He ate, along towards morning, lying under an overturned pushcart. But mostly, he ran.

Running through deserted streets, panting past burning tenements, cowering behind billboards in the night when cars prowled by—Sheldon moved through dark delirium.

There were bodies everywhere. Scattered forms lay on sidewalks and curbs, knelt in doorways, hung limply over fence rails.

From some of the buildings the sound of voices still echoed, and above them came the noise of the grinding, purring, roaring besiegers. The machines were moving from house to house now—and here the remnants of humanity carried on the fight.

Sheldon ran on. These impressions came in flashes, but in between all was a black blur of panic.

By the time he reached the river he didn't think any more. He swam automatically—dived twice as a hooting tug loomed out of the black-shrouded waters.

Once on the other side Sheldon ran again. He ran until he fell on the roadside, exhausted. When he awoke he ran again.

That was how he lost his time-sense. That, and the fever. He must have been ill for days, there in the deserted farmyard. How he managed to pump water and tend to himself he never knew.

He was weak when he recovered, but not too weak to remember precautions. He kept the lights out and never showed himself, and his ears strained for the noise of machines passing on the road. When the trucks rolled up one afternoon he hid in the loft. They never bothered him during all the hours he lay there. He knew something had been through the house because the back stairs were splintered down and there was grease on the hall floor.

But after that he had some kind of relapse that lasted for weeks. He was all right physically—he killed and ate the chickens and managed to sneak out nights to water the truck garden—but he couldn't think straight.

## IT HAPPENED TOMORROW

All these weeks he never left the farmhouse. For some reason or other he'd lost his curiosity. He didn't hunt for neighbors or even attempt to find out what became of the tenants here. What was the use? He knew the answer, anyway. . . .

It was early autumn when he got a grip on himself at last. He could bear to face the facts again, and think of the future.

That was when he decided to sneak back to the city for a look.

He'd noticed a complete absence of traffic these many weeks past—both on the road and overhead. No cars, no planes—nothing rolled or flew or crawled.

Perhaps something had happened; perhaps the machines had run down. Those thunderstorms might have brought rust. And since they couldn't repair themselves, or refuel or oil. . . .

Anyway, he must find out. There might be others left. Of course, there must be others. Plenty of them, too; men and women who'd been lucky the way he was.

So Sheldon went back.

**I**T WAS a slow trip down a lonesome road. No thumbing a ride, this time.

He plodded along, a forlorn and slightly ludicrous figure in the pair of blue denims he'd found in the farmhouse closet. He carried a knapsack, the traditional burden of necessity. He might have to return to the farmhouse, and if so, he needed to pick up matches, candles, an extra knife, some glue, twine—he'd made the list, feeling like Robinson Crusoe.

No life. Sheldon didn't even see any birds. The fields looked strange without grazing cattle. He was walking through a new kind of nightmare now—a dream of desolation.

It didn't really hit him until he saw the horizon of the city—the strangely smokeless horizon. Then he knew. Then the loneliness really rose to encompass him for the first time.

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## SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

No smoke, no noise, no light, no traffic. No life—and Sheldon was lonely for life.

He started for the deserted bridge, moving slowly. It was almost senseless to cross it. He knew what he'd find. The streets filled with skeletons—skeletons of men and skeletons of machines.

He had guessed the truth. A sight of the city confirmed it. The machines had destroyed, and then were destroyed. Krane's idea; they couldn't survive untended.

A yawning vista rose in Sheldon's consciousness. What now? Suppose he was the only one left? The only man alive?

Alive in a world of death. Alive in a gigantic tomb that was the earth.

He stared again at the city across the bridge. Why go in? Why bother? What difference did it make if he was the last one? Down below the bridge here was the water. It was cool, dark.

Sheldon moved towards the bridge rail. He looked at the water now. He didn't want to see the city, think about the city.

"Don't jump."

But Sheldon did. He jumped back a foot, startled by the unfamiliar sound. A voice. A human voice.

He saw the man then, lying propped against the bridge railing ahead. He was an old, tired man with a grizzled gray beard; clad in rags. But the sight of his wrinkled face and rheumy eyes made Sheldon's heart leap. He was alive—that was what mattered.

Sheldon went towards him.

A hand raised up—a thin, bony claw extended from the frayed sleeve of the bedraggled coat.

Sheldon gripped it.

"Strange—to be shaking hands again," whispered the old man. "That's what I've wanted most of all. The feel of human flesh, alive against my own."

Sheldon didn't answer. A lump choked his throat.

Abruptly the old man laughed. Mirth

## IT HAPPENED TOMORROW

turned to a painful cough in his throat. "Doctor Livingstone, I presume," he cackled.

Sheldon forced a smile. "I'm Dick Sheldon, late of the *Morning Press*."

The oldster croaked again.

"Yes, I know. I recognized you."

"Recognized me?"

"You interviewed me once. I'm George Piedmont."

"Piedmont—the banker." Sheldon spoke the name of the semi-fabulous multimillionaire with incredulity.

"Don't stare so—it's true. But it doesn't matter now, does it? Nothing matters any more."

Sheldon had to force the question.

"What's happened down there—in the city, I mean?"

The old man propped himself painfully against the bridge rail. Slowly he rose to his feet, tottered there with bowed head. The bony hand gestured towards the empty skyscrapers in the distance.

"It's all over," he whispered. "Nothing left. They went from house to house."

"But what are they doing now?"

The croaking laugh rose and the finger jabbed triumphantly.

"That's the joke, Sheldon! The conquerors have become the conquered. That's how I got out—because in the last month, the machines have been running down."

"Something happened to the telephones and electrical power. They tangled up their own communications. Radio went dead, too, with no one to tend to the controls. Cars are out of gas and oil; factories are dead; storms have rusted and rotted the mechanism in the street. Oh, there's more dead in the city than just humans—and it's that way all over the world."

"How did you escape?" Sheldon asked.

"You, of all people?"

Again the laugh.

"That's the cream of the jest, isn't it? A multimillionaire in rags! I was at the bank

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## SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

when the time locks on the safes opened. And the burglar alarms began to ring; the cash registers opened; the door flew wide. Forty millions in the vaults—all there for the taking. But who wanted money?

"And there I was, in the bank, all alone.

Fortunately there was a good stock of provisions in my apartment upstairs. I dragged it all down with me and took it into my retreat."

"But where did you go to escape?" Sheldon asked.

"That's the real joke. You know what I did? I dragged my rations with me—and I locked myself inside one of the bank vaults!"

**P**IEDMONT'S laughter ended in a fit of painful gasps.

"When I came out, it was all over. I couldn't stand what I saw down there, so I dragged myself away. I'm not going to last much longer, you know."

Sheldon was silent.

"I'll be the last man. . . ."

"Perhaps."

"What do you mean?"

"Come closer." The old man suddenly stiffened with effort. "I'm going to tell you something. Something I noticed while crossing the bridge. I saw smoke there on the other side of the river!"

"Then—"

"I don't know. It might be men. It might be—some of them. I thought I'd try and make it, but I know now it's too late. You can go, though."

"I'm staying here with you."

Piedmont smiled. "I can take care of myself," he whispered. "Let me solve the problem in my own way."

Sheldon saw the hand move too late. Piedmont must have been holding the gun inside his pocket all the time. Its report came suddenly, and the bearded banker slumped. Sheldon knelt as the eyes fluttered open. Gray lips parted.



## IT HAPPENED TOMORROW

"Good-by, last man. If you meet anybody—just say—hello. . ."

**S**HELDON'S heart pounded when he saw the smoke. It poured upwards like a black beacon, urging him forward. His pace quickened.

The factory stood on a little rise. *Hollingsford's* said the battered sign on the wire fence enclosing the vast buildings. Munitions, probably. But there was life inside, life making fire.

He passed through the open gate, entered the yards. The concrete was deserted. He saw no lights in the various smaller shops and supply sheds, but the large main plant with the smoke-belching chimneys loomed ahead.

Sheldon edged towards the projecting window ledges.

He climbed slowly. The droning vibration from within the factory walls communicated itself to the iron beneath his feet. He reached the open top of a window, paused and peered in.

His eager eyes stared at the whirring dynamos, the clanking drill-presses, the central moving belt of an assembly line. Cam-shafts, gears, pistons, cranes rolling hand trucks, and conveyors backing from molten furnace piles.

He wanted to see the men, tending their work. But there were no men.

Just the machines, endlessly moving and shifting in a purposeless pattern.

Purposeless? No—for the assembly line was going. Shining silver bodies rested on the treads, moved between descending levers that twisted and tightened bolts, dropped added platings on the moving forms.

Sheldon's eyes roved the interior with ghastly comprehension. The machines were at work—*making machines!*

It had come. They had discovered the way of survival, finally. The life-force, the intelligence behind their animation, had

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## SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

found a way. And here was the production line, turning out the mechanical attendants, the silver servants, the robots.

No arms, or legs, or neck. No head or face. What does a machine need with human limbs or features?

A great round dome on top, with a projecting snout—an oil injector. Below, the two pairs of rotating pincers on extensors. Pincers to grasp gas and oil lines, to tighten bolts, to place rivets, to pump and lift and crank. A round barrel body, with mechanism guarded by steel plating. And below, the gear treads of a tractor, and another set of pincers—for climbing.

Now these things were being completed, to go forth and resurrect the rusted, the empty, the broken. An army of them, caterpillar into the world, to restore the machine empire. An army to tend the idiotic grinding and clanking of a purposeless mechanical civilization.

A senseless anger rose in Sheldon's breast. His consciousness, his life-force cried out against this cold, impersonal dream of the future—a world without laughter and without tears, without love or conscience, without goal or ideal.

He must stop it, somehow. But—how?

Then he remembered. It had been a munitions plant—so there would be dynamite somewhere.

If he could reach it and return. . .

Sheldon descended the ladder very quietly and very cautiously.

He found the stuff.

Nitro. Heavy kegs. One would be enough—and one was all he could lift; all he could carry up the ladder.

He made haste. He reached the top of the window, stared in. His hands propped the heavy keg before him.

Then he heard it—the scraping from below. Eyes wide with horror, Sheldon saw the thing emerge. It rolled across the yard, swift and shining, its treads rotating. Then it reached the base of the ladder and up-

## IT HAPPENED TOMORROW

ended. The lower clamps shot out. The robot began to climb.

SHeldon climbed, too. As he did, he suddenly noted that all noise from within the shop had ceased. An ominous silence dropped like a heavy cloud. The line had stopped moving; it was as though the machines were waiting.

He climbed. Over his shoulder he saw the pursuing robot swinging up the iron rungs.

Sheldon gasped.

Above him, peering over the edge of the factory roof, another round head gleamed in the slanting sun, and the horrid nozzle of the oil-feeder thrust down like a snout. Predatory, beastlike, it crouched and its raking pincers extended.

They'd have him now. No way to turn. One above and one below.

A million streams of consciousness converged in a raging torrent in Sheldon's brain. Man had built machines—machines destroyed Man—money couldn't save him; the power of the press couldn't save him; guns couldn't save him; love couldn't save him. Man's day was over, and the machines would rule because there was no weapon to turn against them.

No weapon?

There was—life. The last life on Earth. That was the only weapon Man had.

It took a second, but already the pincers below were extended, the pincers above were looming and thrusting.

Then Sheldon turned on the ladder. He clasped the keg to his breast. He looked down, grinned.

And jumped.

Sheldon never heard the explosion. His last conscious thought—the last conscious thought of a human brain on Earth—was of his body turning over and over. Turning over and over, as the earth turned over and over amidst the stars like a tiny cog in the vast machinery of the illimitable cosmos.

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## SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

(Continued from page 30)

have been caught in a—?—energy vortex and caused to—?—on Earth, and now you have been raised by the animals.

Think, child. Think of the feral children of this native race. When they were restored to their own kind, did they become human? No, it was too late. The basic personality traits are determined in the first years of childhood, and their specifically human attributes, unused, had atrophied.

It is too late, too late. Your mind has become too fixed in rigid and limited patterns. Your body has made a different adjustment from that which is necessary to sense and control the forces we use. You even need a machine to speak.

You no longer belong to our race.

Joel lay huddled on the ground, shaking, not thinking or daring to think.

The thunders rolled through his head: We cannot have you interfering with the proper mental training of our children. And since you can never rejoin your kind, but must make the best adaptation you can to the race you live with, the kindest as well as the wisest thing for us to do is to make certain changes. Your memory and that of others, your body, the work you are doing and have done—

There were others filling the night, the gods come to Earth, shining and terrible beings who lifted each fragment of experience he had ever had out of him and made their judgments on it. Darkness closed over him, and he fell endlessly into oblivion.

HE AWOKE in his bed, wondering why he should be so tired.

Well, the cosmic-ray research had been a hard and lonely grind. Thank heaven and his lucky stars it was over! He'd take a well-earned vacation at home now. It'd be good to see his friends again—and Peggy.

Dr. Joel Weatherfield, eminent young physicist, rose cheerfully and began making ready to go home.

## ESCAPE TO CHAOS

(Continued from page 65)

"I know all that. It was just an odd feeling. But strong, Solin. Very strong."

SARRZ, Deputy Director of the Bureau of Sociometrics, turned in his chair so that he would not have to look at the face of the female Agent who had asked to speak with him after she and Solin had made a rather disappointing, but unavoidable, report on the demise of one Andro, rebel of Era 4.

"You say you are troubled."

She chose her words carefully. "I wish to request EC, Deputy Director. I have had odd imaginings. Possibly the strain of the last few months in Era 4."

"Do you care to tell me any of them?"

She shrugged. "They are all a bit ridiculous. It seemed that in some other existence we had saved Andro rather than permitting him to be killed. I know how unfortunate a mistake it would have been to save him again. Also, I found myself thinking that we had lost some of the eras by permitting too great a probability divergence from our basic eras. And during the last sleep I dreamed that we have a power source which can cause slip to any era, no matter how divergent."

"Those are concrete examples. But what is your attitude toward them?"

"Awe, I would say. Foreboding. And a feeling of having led other existences."

Sarrz said, "All of us have dreams. I dreamed of dying at this desk. I have dreamed of losing all the worlds."

"And you feel fear?"

"Tension. Doubt. But those, I feel, are the result of our primitive heritage. It is in our blood and our bones to think of only one space and one time. Now we know that there are twenty-six available space-times contiguous to our own which we can reach, and an infinite number of others that we cannot yet reach. I would not worry too much, Agent Calna. We live in a day of

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oddness, of new philosophic evaluations, of invisible doors which have opened so that we can step through. The first wild dogs that joined savage man in his caves must have had uneasy dreams by the fires of night. And maybe, Agent Calna, we are no higher in our possible evolutionary scale than those dogs were in relation to the man they joined. Even now, at this moment, some inconceivable intelligence from our remote future may be tampering with our acts and the consequences of our acts. Such tampering would leave elusive traces in your mind, in my mind. Possibly every time we enter a strange room and have the feeling that we have been in that room before, it is because we actually *have* been in that room, in some fragmentary part of a vast experiment which was later abandoned. Our present actions, this very conversation, this room . . . it could all be part of an artificially induced environment merely in order to test your reaction and mine. In fact, you may not even exist in the ordinary sense of the word, but only as a manufactured entity thrown into my personal equation as some portion of a test for a solution."

The girl smiled uncertainly. "This begins to sound like one of the conversations planned to disprove the existence of everything except the mind of the beholder."

"I will approve EC if you insist."

"I think I must insist."

"You can report to EC at once, if you wish. I will reassign Solin, and give you a new partner when you return."

The girl left. Sarraz sat in utter stillness for a long time. The girl's request had crystallized some of his own weary doubts as to the rightness of the entire program on which they had embarked.

He sat and felt a sour yearning for the days gone by, the days when man could concern himself with only one environment—back in the functional simplicity of the third atomic era.



## MISSIVES AND MISSILES

(Continued from page 14)

Dear Editor:

Following are my ratings of the stories appearing in the January issue:

HAND FROM THE VOID 1

THE BLOOD STAR 4

DESTINY DEFERRED 5

ETERNITY ORBIT 7

RAMPART OF FEAR 2

FIRST LIFE 6

VICTORY UNINTENTIONAL 3

All in all it was an excellent issue—a big improvement over those of several years ago. Keep up the high standard.

Yours truly,

F. Lee Jacquette  
145 Shoreview Road  
Manhasset, L. I.

Dear Editor:

Please do not let SSS start printing reprints. This is the last word in ugliness to spoil a worthwhile pulp. (Unless it is a mag devoted strictly to reprints.) First, VICTORY UNINTENTIONAL was not good. The mags of today insist on stories of almost slick quality. (Am I not right?) Writers of today are forced to meet higher standards than ever before.

BLOOD STAR and RAMPART OF FEAR were among the stories grabbing honors for January. FIRST LIFE was pleasantly written but its theme was senseless. I would like to see what else Roger Dee has to offer.

SSS covers can be improved over January, I hope. (Another woman partially unclothed.) SSS sells without the need of these women on the cover.

Sincerely yours,

Francis M. Mulford  
512 Linwood Avenue  
Buffalo, New York

And that's all we have room for, friends.  
See you in two months!

### OPINION TALLY

January, 1951

- |                                |     |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Victory Unintentional ..... | 2.2 |
| 2. Hand from the Void .....    | 2.3 |
| 3. Rampart of Fear .....       | 3.3 |
| 4. The Blood Star .....        | 4.0 |
| 5. Destiny Deferred .....      | 4.2 |
| 6. Eternity Orbit .....        | 4.8 |
| 7. First Life .....            | 5.6 |

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